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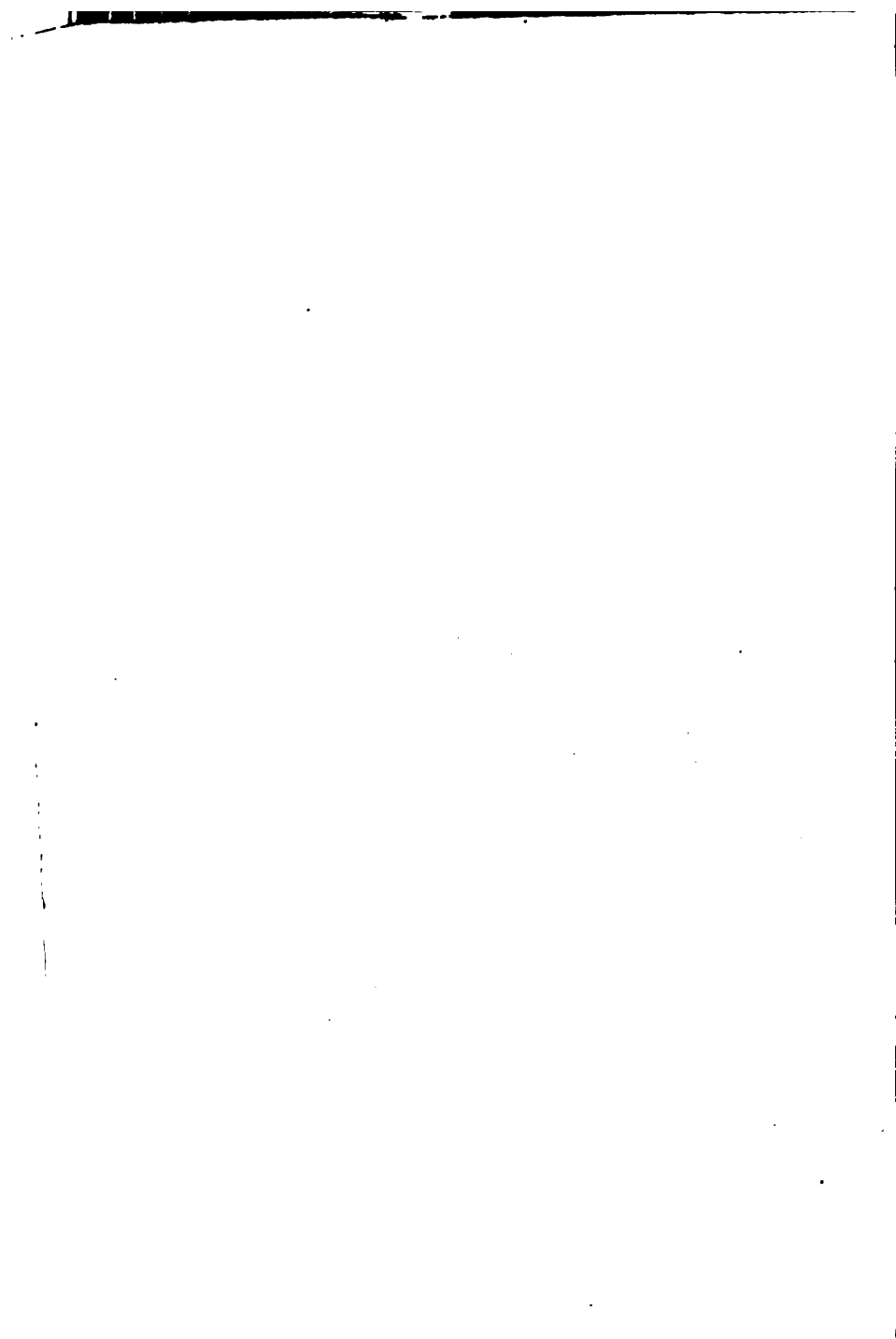




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**NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL.**

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# NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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## NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL.



### CHAPTER I.

THE little pleasant heat consequent on her victory being over, Kate roamed about in her self-chosen, self-soothing solitariness, unremonstrated with, unrebuked by any human being. She was not in the least afraid of being left to her own society and protection: why should she? There were no wolves in grandmothers' guise to lure unsuspecting Red Ridinghoods to their destruction. What harm would these gay-clothed holiday-makers do her? They were far too much occupied in chaffering with the young men and women — gentlemen and ladies, I suppose I should say—at the



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gination of a sculptor to create or his fingers to execute,—the Laocoon. What the Australian aborigines—flat-nosed, dwindle-limbed—are to us, such are we to those colourless, lifeless, motionless wonders. Generation after generation of short-spanned living creatures has ripened and rotted, they looking calmly on, superior in their unwithering amaranthine bloom—generation after generation has gaped open-mouthed, awed by their solemn presence—generation after generation will so gaze and stare until the world is overrun with a new deluge of barbarians from the far West, or till it comes to its final ending. That happy man, to whose deathless glory it was granted to fashion the Laocoon, must have had in his mind to excite the envy and shame of puny, feeble after-ages, long after he and his chisel should be dust together; showing them what manner of men there were in the old time, in blue-skied templed Hellas. But then, again, one feels

inclined—perhaps from aversion to acknowledge that we have degenerated—to doubt whether those god-faces and Titan-frames could have been copied from any mere flesh-and-blood creature that, while in life, drudged away on the earth and had material blood flowing in his veins. Could such stainless triumphant beauty and might have been ever found in our world, where perfection in anything is proverbially unattainable? Rather must it have been some divine *afflatus* breathed into the fashioner's soul, speaking to him of a flawlessness of outward build such as had never been patent to his bodily eyes. Assuredly the gods must have revealed themselves to him in visions of the night, and even after they vanished have haunted him ceaselessly, driving him to reproduce in the plastic clay those features and limbs of immortal majesty which before had been graven on the tables of his soul. And yet, despite all my reasoning to the contrary, I feel



that the father and sons in the Laocoon are men and not gods. In their suffering we recognise their humanity. That is a badge that all the bond-servants of the flesh wear without exception; there is no mistaking it. In the dignity of their eternal agony we recognise their brotherhood to ourselves.

At the end of her reverie Kate fell a despising her fellow-beings, her acquaintances—their *physique* at least. In fancy she compared the men and women who walked and talked around her in her daily life to these Venuses and wrestlers and Diskoboloi. O me, how poor they were, how wretched and slight-framed and sketchy—the men especially—such laths and maypoles! It diverted her in imagination to set plump George Chester by the side of that fighting gladiator with the close-shorn shapely head and the extended arms. Ah, yes! there was only one man she had ever known who could stand a

comparison with that deathless athlete. A heavy sigh supervened.

I do not believe in coincidences generally; but I think that was a coincidence, that, as she sighed, two voices burst upon her—two voices talking close to her in the next court, a man's and a woman's; the woman first saying lackadaisically:

"There's no privacy in this horrid place, and nowhere hardly to sit down."

And then the man answering: "Come in here and we shall find both, if I am not mistaken."

At that man's voice Kate started so violently that she almost fell off her seat; her small fingers dug unconsciously into the palms of her hands, and her heart surged and beat so loud that it seemed to shut out all other sounds. Was there only a torturing resemblance in these cathedral-bell tones; or was it—could it be really the one voice that had ever sounded in the world for her? As she sat there stricken,

parted-lipped, wide-eyed, that man and woman came in together. A tall woman, silk-and-velvet clad, with trailing garments, sweeping amply round her; a woman not old nor young; at that dangerous age when a handsome woman has not faded but ripened; when one, whose whole profession in life has been flirting, has, through many years' practice, attained a master's proficiency in that art. That lady was "*somebody*," certainly; so one said to oneself at the first glance, and not a nice "*somebody*" one added after the second. The purple and the tiara of Livia or Agrippina would have well beseeemed that low, lineless brow; a woman with a bold, sensual, snaring face, with a lissom, undulating empress form. And the man? Ay, one with a dark, ugly face; a man, you would infallibly turn to look back at, if you passed him in the street. One which approached more nearly in physical conformation to Achilles or Telamonian Ajax than to most of the men one sees

in the present small-boned days. Lean flanked, with shoulders that looked as if, Atlas-like, they could support the burden of the world; and a vast chest that five-and-forty inches could not have compassed. Yes, it was he; there were not many like him, thought the girl, cowering and shaking there on the bench. They came in sauntering; did not see her, they were so much taken up with each other; sat down side by side on the other side of the court, away from her, and began to talk in an intimate, confidential way, or rather continued a conversation which had evidently been begun before.

"It was very good of you to come to-day," said Colonel Stamer, bending familiarly over his companion. "I hardly thought you would have been able to compass it."

"To tell you the truth," she answered, looking up with her bold eyes at him, "no more did I, though I did not say anything about it in my note. He has taken to watch-

ing me like a lynx lately. Rather foolish of him, is not it, to do such a useless thing? as if a woman could not outwit a man any day!" she ended, with a careless, scornful laugh.

"I'd back them, indeed," said Dare grimly; "but let's hear how you managed it this time."

"O," she answered, shrugging her shoulders, "easily enough, as it turned out. He is gone down to that dreary swamp of his in Lincolnshire to-day, and he is going to drag me down there to-morrow, I believe; so I suppose he thought I might be trusted by myself for four-and-twenty hours;" and again she laughed quite heartily at the thought of how cleverly she had circumvented her lord.

Dare laughed too. "Poor thing!" he said, taking her hand carelessly; but, even as he spoke, he smothered a yawn; even this intrigue could not keep at bay the old persecuting sense of *ennui*.

"He threatened to chaperon me to Elise's the other day," continued the fair complainant, pouting at the recollection of her wrongs. "There would have been a nice *esclandre* if he had—would not there? Good gracious!" she added, hastily changing her tone, "we are not alone here. Look at that girl sitting over there listening to us."

Dare put his glass to his eye, and turned round haughtily, intending to *look over* the impertinent intruder who had dared to play eaves-dropper to him; but when his eyes did fall on that intruder, he gave just such another start as Kate had done. "Good God!" he exclaimed, involuntarily, and he paled visibly, even through his bronzed skin; and a flood of light flowed over his face, such as the woman by his side would never have had power to call there.

"What's the matter?" she asked eagerly, in much surprise.

With a great effort he mastered himself

sufficiently to answer, almost coolly, "O, nothing ; only it's an unpleasant idea being spied upon. Let us come away from here, if you are rested—are you ?"

"Yes," she said, and she began leisurely to put on a lace veil she had taken off.

"Come," he urged impatiently, not quite master of himself; and he hurried away, without giving her time to ask any more questions or make any remarks. What became of that virtuous matron, Lady —, that second Cornelia, after this ? I am unable to state whether Colonel Stamer had the good luck to meet with some mutual acquaintance who took her off his hands ; whether he hurried her to the railway station, and into the train ; whether he made some lame excuse for leaving her in the lurch, or whether he made no excuse at all, I cannot pretend to say. Certain it is that, in what seemed about five minutes' time, he found himself again at the entrance to that statued court, ascertained by one swift glance that that

girl was still sitting there, huddled up on the bench in the same attitude as he had left her in, and came striding towards her with an eager haste, that formed a strange contrast to his usual proud laziness.

"Is it you, Kate?" he asked rapidly, in a low thick voice; "is it the little Kate Chester I used to know such a long time ago? Let me touch you, that I may see whether it is really you, or whether it is only some phantom that the foul fiend has sent to tantalise me as he has so often done before. Am I mad or drunk, I wonder? I should not be surprised at either. Speak to me quick, Kate, if it is you, and tell me so."

"It is I," answered Kate, almost under her breath, and the room seemed to be going round and round with her, the statues tumbling off their pedestals, and dancing up and down, and a general blackness coming over the face of everything.



"Thank God!" came through the blackness to her ears in the deep soft voice, like the low notes of a rich-toned organ. "Kate, I never thought so before; but I do believe now that there are some higher powers that have a hand in human affairs. To think that you and I should be meeting again after all these weary months and years, as we never thought we should. Did we, child?"

"No," answered Kate faintly; gradually, by a great struggle, getting the better of an inclination to swoon.

Dare stretched out his arms in his triumphant joy, to take her to himself in the old possessive way, despite all that had come and gone; despite that cruel story, which, told and listened to under the solemn stars on that June night, had placed so unspannable a gulf between them. But she shrank away from him, bent on keeping strong and bright before her mind's eye the bare freezing truth that

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this man was another woman's property ; though now that she was in his presence once again, she felt plain enough how entirely futile and gainless had been all her struggles and self-discipline and arguments ; how that she loved him far, *far* more intensely and measurelessly than ever. Her capacity and ability for loving had, with all these smotherings and chastenings, only grown broader, and more profound.

"My darling, my darling," went on the rich voice, shaking and quivering, "*how* glad I am to see you again!"

No oath of a dying man could have borne with it more conviction of its entire truthfulness than that simple assertion. He took both her hands in his, and bending down, gazed greedily on the small face almost as pale as the statued Venus above her, on the glorious hair rippling away in its old wealth under the simple bonnet.

"It cannot be chance, Kate, that brought

us both here to-day," he urges, speaking low, while the little white hands tremble and thrill in his ; "it must be Providence. The Almighty (if there is such a one) has seen that the sacrifice you made was too great for you. He has given it back into your hands. He has brought us together again, never to part any more now, child, never again."

And the voice that had sounded like a brazen trumpet, shouting the word of command to his men through the mists and the fog on Inkerman morning, wavered in uttering those few sweet last words.

"No, it is not God's doing; I know it is not," murmured Kate feebly.

She did not seem to see or hear anything quite right yet ; but still dimly perceived and resisted the sophistry of his reasoning.

"It is, it must be," pressed Dare vehemently. "You are ready enough to see the hand of God in every little finger-

ache, in every shower of rain, or any such every-day occurrence, and you won't see it now where it is so plain. You say that this God of yours desires His creatures' happiness. Well, He sees that you and I cannot live without one another, so He has given us back to each other. He's omnipotent. What are the wretched rotten straws with which men tie and bind themselves in His eyes?"

"Not live without me!" said Kate, in a distincter, louder tone than she had yet said anything, almost bitterly; for the recollection of that pang of jealousy she had felt roused her, and brought her back to herself. "Then who was that woman whose society you seemed to be enjoying so much just now? She is much more worthy of your love than I, with her beautiful face and her yellow hair. I look hideous and deformed beside her."

"Don't speak of her, darling," said Dare, reddening a little; "she is a bad woman,

not fit for you to take her name between your lips, my little pure snowdrop."

"Why do you talk to her and make love to her then, Dare?" asks Kate earnestly, hating to picture her Dare caressing this yellow-haired rival; and the full lips quiver mutely, and just one big tear steals into the corner of each troubled eye.

"Because she amuses me," answers Dare lightly, disliking the subject, and longing to dismiss it; "because she keeps me from thinking," he went on, with a gloomy shadow stealing over his face. "I'm beginning to think, Kate, that thought and madness are synonymous. It is so pleasant sitting down in one's own society, and letting one's fancy run riot amongst the joys that every step of one's life unfolds to one. I wonder you have not found it so."

"Of course I have," answers Kate, a little eased of her jealous fears. "My

whole life for the last year and a half has been a hard fight against thought and memory. I have given up fighting against anything now," she added, shaking her head wearily, "I'm so tired of everything. What's the good of kicking against Fate? It's Kismet."

She said no more then, and he was too busy to make her any answer; busy gloating, miser-like, with bold, glad eyes, over his recovered pearl; eyes that she did not blush or wince under, as in the old coy girlish days. She was a woman now, not a girl, past blushing or hiding away from those orbs of fire. In a little while the low man's voice sounded again wooingly through the tenantless room.

"Are not you going to look up at me once, Kate? I want to have one look into the odd big green eyes. Have not you got *one* kind word to say to a poor fellow, after all this dreary time?"

Kate had purposely kept her eyes down-

cast, their bright lashes sweeping the stainless cheeks. She had not dared to raise them. Dare's had lost none of their old magic. She felt that, throbbing veined. She remembered how, formerly, they had thrilled and maddened her; drawn her with a fascination far exceeding that of the charming serpent; had swayed her as the moon sways the ocean tides. But she could not resist that appeal. Slowly she raised her own and rested them on his, in which the light was flashing and dancing.

"O, Dare, Dare!" she groaned, "why have you come back to torment me, when I was so much better and happier without you?"

"Happier!" echoed Dare, catching at the word, while the pent-house brows drew together thunderously. "I see you have found some one to fill my place much more satisfactorily. Woman's fickleness is a worn-out old proverb," he went on sneeringly. "It's a story nearly as old

as Adam. I expect the only reason that Eve was faithful to him was that there was no one to teach her unfaithfulness. Unstable as water is a weak comparison, I am beginning to think. Unstable as woman would be more to the purpose. So, Kate, you had quite forgotten the old love till his ugly face intruded on you so unseasonably to-day, had you?"

"Forgotten you!" answered Kate, not flinching a bit under the wrathful questioning face, with concentrated passion—not a girl's milk-and-water love—in every eloquent feature. "Forgotten you! I wish to God I could! Every hour of my life I curse the day when I first saw you, standing—O, what a fool I am to remember it so well!—on the shore, in your boating-dress, with your hat off; and you looked down upon me, and smiled away my stupid senses."

"Curse it you may, if it gives you any satisfaction," replied Dare morosely, biting



his lips; "but for all that you cannot deny that neither you nor I were ever half so happy before; never shall be again, as long as we live. No, if you must curse any day, Kate, curse that one, when a wretched, prudish quirk, a namby-pamby sentimentalism for that great coarse mass of flesh and blood that I have the happiness to call wife, made you utterly blight and take all savour out of two lives; when you tore yourself—you little cruel, beautiful fool!—out of the arms that would have sheltered you all your life from the smallest gust of ill-luck or harm; tore yourself away and left me standing there so frightly desolate without you. There has never been a warm night since, Kate, with the south wind blowing coolly over the sea, that I have not lived those tortures over again, thanks to you."

He had grown vehement, rapid as he went on; and now he loosed one of Kate's hands, and with his own freed one pushed off the short twining rings of silky hair im-

patiently from his forehead, as if with them he could push off the load of sin and suffering that was weighing on that sun-kissed ample brow.

"Poor, poor fellow!" sighed Kate pityingly. That is the best of women; they always feel their friends' pains and aches so much more keenly than their own.

"Ay, Kate," went on Dare, softening a little under the influence of this blandishment, but still looking down very ruefully upon her from his commanding height, with reproach in his anxious, covetous eyes, "you're grown very prudish and cold and correct of late, I'm afraid; but even you would have pitied me, I think, if you could have looked into my soul that night, and seen the utter blackness there. When you took *yourself* away you knew that you took everything, and yet you did it. O, child! how could you be so inhuman? I think, if you could have seen the frightful nothingness and emptiness you caused, you'd have

repented, good and strong-minded as you were, and come back to the sinner that loved you better far than all the cold-blooded saints in paradise, or out of it, could ever do. Kate, do you think you would have pitied me? Say you would anyhow."

Kate's heart was torn and rent by the unstudied, unwitting pathos of that broken husky voice, of those world-weary, wicked, miserable eyes.

"O, Dare, stop; do stop," she prayed earnestly, while her white cheeks were watered by streaming tears. "I cannot pity you more than I pitied myself. You were then, you are now, all the world to me. I love your sins better than anyone else's virtues. I think of you all day long, and I dream of your grand eyes all the night. I beg God every hour to let me die and forget you; for that's the only way I ever could; but He won't. Do you suppose it was no trial to me to go away from you,

and give you up? Ah, my darling, you don't know how ill I was after that terrible night; they all thought I was going to die; if I had, I should infallibly have gone to hell. I sometimes doubt," she added, with a look of awed reflection, "whether I could have been much more hopelessly unhappy even there."

"Child, don't cry," said Dare harshly; "I cannot bear to see it; you'll drive me to kiss away the tears, and ruin your character for your whole life, I suppose," he added sardonically; "you'd better dry your eyes quick, or you'll run a very good chance of such pollution."

Kate dried her eyes obediently, and he went on:

"Every word you utter only confirms what I said at first. Apart from each other, you and I are like galvanised dead bodies that have a mechanic motion, but no life; we cannot live anything that is worthy the name of life without one another."

"I can live without you, Dare," answered Kate, looking up simply into that long-unseen, haughty face, with eyes mist-obscurcd still, hard as she was trying to swallow down the fresh torrent of tears that seemed rising in her throat. "I have done it now for a year and a half, and I'm not dead; I'm not even sick or ailing."

"You say you're not sick or ailing," said Dare; and then he led her to a mirror that hung on the wall in a corner of the court. "Look there," he said, "do you see how changed you are? I never saw a person so much altered in the whole course of my life; you were always a pale little lily, but you are almost as white as snow now; and see what dark marks you have got under those great melancholy eyes of yours; you used to be such a cheery, laughing little thing, and now you have got the saddest face I ever saw. You are not sick or ailing, no doubt; but if you do not take care you'll be in your grave soon."

"I'm sorry I've grown such a scarecrow, Dare," says Kate, looking sadly at her own image in the glass, with a very faint poor smile.

"What! you care about your beauty still, do you, Kate?" asked Dare, smiling too—one of his well-remembered curving smiles, half seen under the heavy moustache, quite a pleasant glad smile—"that's more like the wicked, vain, little flirt I used to know in the dear old dead-and-gone days."

"Dare, am I grown very ugly?" inquired Kate, turning to him with a grave face. "Tell me the truth, please. I know I never was very pretty; but am I much gone off?"

"Ugly!" said Dare, laughing, despite all his bitter griefs and mortifications; "God forbid! You may set your mind at rest on that point, Kate, I think. Why, child, have you no eyes? Cannot you see that you are six times as tormentingly bewitching as

ever ? I could never make out what devilry there was in your little face ; do you remember, Kate ?" he said excitedly, bending down his lips so close to her that his breath fanned her round white ear, and gently agitated the hair sweeping away behind it. "It puzzles me more than ever now, do you know ? I have seen scores of women a thousand times as pretty and as witty as you, and I felt that they might all go to the dogs together, for all I'd do to stop them. You are the one woman in the world for me ; do you know that, little one?"

Kate did not answer. "You're changed too, Dare, now I come to look at you," she said, scanning his rough-hewn massive features. "It is not for the better you are changed. You were always a bad man, as I know to my cost ; but you are wickeder and more reckless than ever now. I can tell that. How haggard you are too, and hollow-eyed ! Poor fellow ! poor fellow !"

"Yes, Kate," answered Dare calmly, with a very dreary laugh that the heart denied all partnership in: "that nice pious half-hour's work you did on that night you know of, sent me galloping along the road to hell at an edifying rate. You saved your own soul, I daresay, very comfortably and properly, but you damned mine. O God! how changed you are since the day when you said that even heaven itself would be dull to you without me!"

"I'm not changed in any way!" cried Kate eagerly; "I'm exactly the same as I always was, unluckily for me."

"No, you are not," contradicted Dare, with impassioned mournfulness. "You're not the little girl with the big loving eyes, that sat on that garden-seat beside me in the conservatory at Llyn; whose arms I have felt warm and soft about my neck, incredible as such familiarity seems now."



"Ah, Dare," sighed Kate, interceding for forgiveness, "I did not know then."

"O, of course not," cried Dare, with the bitterness of a soul cut off from friendship and companionship with its equals, "of course, I know that my boyish folly has shut me out for ever from all good women's endearments."

"My darling, my own lost Dare, I *am* unutterably, frightfully glad to see you again. I do not care how wicked it is. I must say so just this once. I should die if I did not."

Dare answered not with words, but he caught her to him and held her as a man might hold the delight of his eyes raised up to him again by a miracle from among the shrouded dead.

At last Dare's voice, sounding unsteady and thick—

"You're mine, Kate. You cannot go back. You'll stay with me always, in life

and death. Do you hear, child ? I shall hold you here till you say 'yes.' "

His words roused the girl from a happy baleful trance. She struggled a little ; she freed herself to a certain extent ; that is to say, she raised her chestnut head, and answered him with startled self-condemning eyes, coming back from the gardens of the Hesperides to the world's dusty highway :

"I'd give all the world to be able to say 'yes,' but I dare not." And then this weak girl's good angel, who had been hovering near, heavy-winged, unseen, mourning over her folly—her almost fall—drew near, endowed with holy strength to save, and whispered good words to her heart to say. "O, Dare," she went on, with that blessed impulse driving her forward, "just think what a short wretched span life is. How soon it is over and passed away for ever ; and I'm sure, too—I do not know why—but I *am* sure that mine will be even shorter and sooner over than it is

the general lot to be. Dare, Dare, I know—I feel certain—that Heaven will be pitiful to us ; and not let either you or me drag out weary days to anywhere near threescore-and-ten. But then, Dare, there'd have to come another worse parting at the end—worse, because it would be so utterly hopeless. O love!" she said, with a purer better light replacing the passion glow on her face, "you know what you are to me; you know that I'm like a reed in your hands, to be bent and broken as you will. O, have pity on me! Don't tempt me any longer. Let me go away, and try to struggle on a little bit in that good path that I hoped I had made a few steps in, before some devil threw me in your way again to-day."

Dare stroked his great moustache with an impatient angry movement, and answered with fierce irritability:

"You're selfish, Kate ; you think of nothing but yourself. It's the old story of your profound affection for me, and your

determination to blast my life with your piety. I have no doubt that good books, and good works, and good *men* perhaps" (with a sneer), "would soon compensate you for my loss ; but what am I to do, child ? tell me that. Do I forget so easily ? If you steal yourself away from me again so meanly, so heartlessly, what substitute can I ever find for you ?"

"O, my own," she said, with tearful caressingness, "my only love, don't you suppose I was thinking of you too ? Have not we both been sinning and suffering in the same way ? Won't the same recipe do for us both ? Ah, Dare," she went on, "ah, Dare, won't you try and walk in another path too ? You will I know, for my sake, for the sake of the poor stupid girl that has loved you better than ever woman loved man before. You'll try to be a better man, darling, won't you ? instead of such a dreadfully wicked one ; and then, who knows," she added,

trying to smile through her tears, "God is very merciful ; perhaps He'll let our paths meet at the end. Say you'll try, Dare. O do ! for my sake !"

"I'll tell no such lies," exclaimed Dare hastily. "To think of my turning saint, and quoting Scripture at this time of day ! I'm rather too old to cry *peccavi*. No, Kate," he went on, clenching his hand, and bringing it down emphatically on his knee, "I warn you that if you rob me now of the one treasure I have got in the world, I'll go to the deuce as hard as I can ; and whatever evil deeds I do will lie at your door for this day's work ; mind that."

"No, they won't," replied Kate quickly, too spirited not to resist this injustice. "If you go to the bad as you say, it'll break my heart most likely, and not much matter either ; but the guilt of your sins will not fall on my head."

Dare left his raving, and his threats—

he saw they did no good; his voice fell into the old wooing key, infinitely tender.

"It shall not fall on anyone's head; they shall not be committed at all, if you will but stay with me, Kate. Child, I never asked a favour of human being before, but I implore you now to grant me this one little request; just say, 'I will.' Those two short words will marry us so effectually in the sight of God. Say them, Kate, say them."

"No, no, no!" cried Kate, sobbing and gasping in this terrible conflict. "Don't try to blind me with your sophistries. Whilst I'm with you, I lose the distinction between right and wrong; it's all a great black mist to me; but I *must* go, I *must*, I *must*!"

"Go!" repeated Dare, actually laughing in his utter astonishment at and ridicule of this proposal; "go, indeed! when I have hardly seen you for five minutes yet—when you have not told me where you live; nor

.

when you'll meet me again, nor any of the thousand-and-one things that I want you to tell me before we part, if we ever do again."

"We shall never *meet* again, Dare," Kate said solemnly; and by a great exertion of self-command she said it with a steady voice.

"*What?*" asked Dare in a hoarse whisper, and further could he say nothing.

"We shall never meet again, if I can help it," reiterated Kate. "I shall pray God to keep us apart. Never again, dear love, never again;" and she groaned as she uttered those funeral words.

Dare fought with the agony and fear that were gnawing and almost mastering him, and said at last, rapidly, harshly:

"And you can sit there, and tell me so, calmly?"

"Yes, I can," she answered resolutely. "There is nothing harder left for me to do than what I have already done; there is no cup left for me to drink bitterer than that

you put to my lips, long ago, on the Pen Dyllas sands."

Dare's swarthy face grew very white—hard even.

"Impossible," he said angrily, "you cannot deny me what hundreds of people, who don't value it, who would as soon see any other face and hear any other voice as yours, enjoy every day—the sight of you, the sound of your voice, the touch of your hand in common greeting. Absurd—quixotic! O, child, forgive me, if I speak roughly to you; but a man does not stick upon forms and ceremonies much, when he is wrestling for the last hope he has in the world, and sees it vanishing away, without power to detain it."

"Dare," she said, enunciating each word slowly and distinctly, "you and I must be either all or nothing to each other; we cannot be the one, so we must be the other."

"Must we?" he said, putting one hand before his face to hide its blank despair; "then God help us!"



His wrath yielded to intense self-pity as he spoke, and the deep voice almost broke down in the utterance of his desolation. She could bear his anger, threats, frowns, but could she bear the bitter plaintiveness of those ringing tones that had whispered away her soul long ago by the summer sea? Her storm-shattered heart wavered. Should she stay with him after all?—for better, for worse—for richer, for poorer—in sickness, and in health, till death should them part? They would be married in the sight of God, he had said. Could it be right?—to send this man back, desperate, hopeless, to his evil companions—to bad men and worse women? Could it be right for the sake of a prejudice of society to damn this soul utterly? But then there rose up before her dazed eyes a pale, thin, holy face—the face of one

“Within whose ears an angel ever sang  
Good tidings of great joy.”

If she did this thing, if she took this step,

she could never look on that pure, kind, saintly face again—could never be worthy to shake him by the hand again as a friend. What a load of sorrow and care she should, by this act of hers, add to the already pressing burden that weighed on the bowed shoulders of that poor good man!

Dare, watching her, lynx-eyed, saw her shaken, hesitating, and seized his opportunity; he had not space to lose many now.

“Kate, a drowning man catches at straws, you know. I saw you waver just now; I know your face so well. After all, you care enough about me to be a little sorry at throwing me away like an old glove that you have no further use for. Kate, it is not too late to repent even at this eleventh hour. I adjure you not to send me back, a ruined undone man, to the society of devils, or to my own, which is worse than any devils’. O, child, child, I’m so lonely. Stay with me!”

“Hush,” she said wildly, putting her

hands to her ears; "I won't listen to you; have not I been like a house divided against itself ever since I knew you? Have not you done me enough harm already, blighting my life with your love that is crueler than any hatred?"

A spasm of pain crossed his face. "Yes," he said, "I have blighted your life; you say truth, and that is the very reason why I want you to stay with me. I *know* I could make you so happy, Kate; I would not ask you if I were not sure of it. O my little one, let me try! Come to me!"

"Never!" she said emphatically, clenching her hands, "the most utter hopeless misery would be better than such happiness."

He made no more effort to move her; he only turned his face to the wall and groaned. "Very well," he said harshly, "you know best, I suppose; go back to your friends and be happy in your own way. I'm not fit company for you, I know that well enough."

She had told him she must go, and he did not seek to keep her; six faltering steps she made towards the door, and then stopped irresolute, and looked towards him. He was sitting bowed together on the bench; his dark face buried in his hands. Some impulse prompted her to pass over and touch him on the sleeve.

"Dare!" she said tremulously. He neither moved nor spoke. "Dare, speak to me!"

He lifted up his head and looked at her. His features were haggard and drawn; rougher hewn and more unbeautiful than ever they looked, and great scorching tears stood in his eyes. "What do you want?" he said roughly. "I told you to go; why aren't you gone? Are you come to mock me in my desolation?"

"To mock you! O no, Dare! I'm come to say good-bye."

"Good-bye, Kate!"

"Have not you got one farewell word to say to me?"

"Kate, the only word I can say to you is, *stay*; if you won't have that, I have none other." He took her two hands in his, and they stood looking at one another silently for what seemed a thousand pulse-beats, her face gradually paling—paling to the whiteness of one that has been a whole day dead.

Then she sighed and drew in her breath. "Yes," she said in a whisper, "I'll stay."

He caught her to him. "My very own at last!" he cried brokenly; "from this day I begin to live!"

"Stop!" she said shuddering, shrinking away from him. "What are you so glad about? Is it matter for rejoicing that you have dragged another soul down to hell with you?"

A few minutes, and then voices are heard; people talking and laughing.

"Dare," said Kate hurriedly, "I hear Margaret's voice; she and my cousins are coming this way. I must go; they must not find me here with you."

"No, that they must not," he said eagerly; "till to-morrow then," with a lingering grudging sigh and gaze; "O why cannot to-day be to-morrow? Why need you go at all? I don't like to let you out of my sight. I mistrust you, Kate!"

"You need not," she said very coldly.

"Are you really speaking truth? are you sure you have not been deceiving me all along?" he asked with passionate earnestness.

"Perfectly sure," she answered stonily.

"As sure as that I stand here the most shameful miserable woman upon God's earth."

Then he let her go. Ten minutes afterwards a rather fat young man, four rather fat young women, and one rather thin young one entered the court sauntering, and found it empty, save one big magnificent-looking man, standing with his back to them, attentively studying the Venus Victrix. Margaret started when first her eyes

fell on that stalwart form; and she tried by various manœuvres to get a view of his face, in which she was completely unsuccessful.

“No, no!” she said to herself, “it must be my fancy; it cannot be he! What should he be doing here?—Why did not you come with us, Kate? Have you got a headache? you look as if you had; take two grains of aconite when you get home; you don’t know what you have missed, does she, George?” cry the female quartette with voluble unanimity, on regaining their truant cousin. “Does not she play superbly? such an exquisite touch! so much improved since last I heard her! I used to think she wanted expression.” &c. &c.

## CHAPTER II.

ALL that night as Kate lay tossing wide-eyed, flushed-cheeked, on a bed from which sleep seemed to have departed thousands of miles, looking every moment towards the window for the first streak of light—wondering, with impatient, feverish unrest, whether a new Egyptian darkness had fallen on the land for a curse, dragging night over the confines of the blessed day,—her good angel and her evil one were fighting and wrestling for her; and towards morning, when first the window-square began to glimmer, faintly seen in the dim, wintry dawn, the evil one got the upper hand. Vanquished utterly, it seemed, the good one fled away, grieved out of heart, almost despairing. She had



perjured herself once (Ananias and Sapphira had been struck suddenly dead for lying); she had caused to wither and fade all the fair leaves and flowers of the green tree of his life, had burnt and scorched it into a sapless scathed trunk; but she would not do it again, and it was love, not fear, drove her. She would go by the train he had told her; he should find her there, waiting for him—waiting for a doom that more than one woman had thought worse than death—had courted death to avoid it. She would go up to him, would tell him that she had come to sacrifice herself to him, that she gave herself up to him body and soul; and then he would kiss her as he had done yesterday (ah, that would make up for anything!), would take her away from the ken of all who had known or loved her before. Yes, she should have to turn her back on all the old, life-long known circle—on Margaret, on Blount, on everything virtuous and reputable. Well, he

would compensate them all, and far more than compensate. Virtue and respectability, and duty, and plenty of friendly relations, had been unendurable without him ; that recipe had nearly killed her ; she would try now whether he and shame would make her happier. There would be no one to tell her she was disgraced and vile, or any other of the ugly names that the world heaps on those women whose love is stronger than their prudence, and, consequently, she should forget whether she was or no. Floating about with him on some stormless isle-studded southern sea, guarded in his arms from the least adverse blast, what would be to her the odds between honour and dishonour, between evil report and good report ? He would not jibe her with all she had lost and thrown away for him ; she should never be vile in his eyes, and as for all others, let them look volumes of scorn and prudery at her, she braved them. Then to her ears

there came, sounding solemnly, mournfully, through the mist, the distance-muffled, varying tones of an early church bell. That sound might have been her own knell, it sank so like lead into her heart. She locked her burning hands tight together, and flung her head wildly about on the pillow, over which the loosened hair streamed in its glorious waves and tangles. Ah, poor James Stanley! she should never see him again in his shabby old mourning, never hear his simple, strengthening, ennobling words. He had done well to cut himself off from companionship with her; he must have had some prophetic instinct that she was unworthy of his friendship. Why, why had not she died, like that snow-pure sister of his with the golden hair and the tender blue eyes, that this world's light was too garish for, that closed so meekly to open again with immortal joy on "the City of the Saints of God"? She had been pure, too, once, pure as that little

dead maiden—pure in thought as in deed, though it seemed many, many years ago now. O, why had he ever come to destroy her? Well, after all, it was just as well that she and James Stanley should not meet again. What could they say to one another if they did? They would have nothing in common henceforth, not a hope, not a thought. He was God's servant, working hard at his post now, and in a very few years would have entered into his rest; while she— Ah! she shuddered at the very name of that she was going to make herself. This train, by which she intended to go to perdition, did not leave Queenstown till between one and two; consequently she should have plenty of time to attend morning-service, and it would excite less suspicion if she did. But it was impossible; she could not. She could not be so awful a hypocrite. God would strike her dead in His house if she polluted it with her presence. She would not expose

herself, either, to the listening to James Stanley's earnest interceding voice. It would only make her remorseful, cowardly, unsettled again. No ; she would tell Margaret that she felt sick and faint, and preferred staying at home and reading the chapters and psalms to herself. Read the chapters and psalms ! Yes, as she and Margaret and Blount used to read them in the long-ago wet Sundays, with the pretty gentle patient mother who had gone from them now. How dared she think of that mother now ! "O mother, mother !" she cried inwardly, "why did you go away and leave me ? If I had had you I could have done without anybody else." She would say she was ill, then. Nobody would accuse her of shamming, she said to herself, with a bitter smile, as she stood before the glass. It looked almost a dying face that she saw there. What could Dare see in those ghastly features to go so wild about ?

There had been a sudden change in the

weather the night before. All night it had been thawing fast, and the ice sailed in broken jagged masses down the dark Thames to the sea; and now this morning there was nothing but mist and fog and drizzle, blotting out the trees and the farther river-banks. Rain, dimming, blurring all the window-panes, bringing out great discoloured patches of damp on the walls of the fine white-stucco houses, streaming slantwise down the chill empty street, turning the gutters into rapid whirling torrents.

In a back street of Queenstown there stood, stands now, a tidy little mean house, with gingerbread-coloured shutters, and a door with a brass knocker, and the name of Mrs. Lewis legibly inscribed underneath. Inside, in the back-parlour, on this identical wet Sunday morning, sat the lady indicated, with a remarkably complacent self-satisfied expression on her double-chinned countenance, the result of an approving

conscience and a modestly flourishing business—sat holding her tea-cup poised in air, in all the glory of her best black-silk dress and bob-curls ; while behind her ample back her son and heir, Master Lewis, with a forethought worthy of a riper age, was surreptitiously employed in storing his breeches-pockets with a miscellaneous assortment of marbles, bull's-eyes, and peppermint-lozenges, against the long morning-service which he knew was imminent, having learned by experience that such were effectual weapons with which to contend against the *ennui* attendant on the litany.

Meanwhile Mr. Stanley was sitting in the dingy little front parlour, having finished his apology for a breakfast some time ago, sitting there quite alone ; for who should there be to be with him ? The little dingy room looked rather more livable and comfortable than was its wont ; it always did on Sunday. The owner always tried to furnish it up a little, and make it more pass-

able on that one day that ruled over the other six. The hearth was clean swept, and a bright little fire burned and crackled upon it. The papers that usually straggled so disorderly all over the green-baize cloth were put up in neat little heaps, and the ink-bottle, for a wonder, had its cover on. James himself sat by the fire in a roomy old brown-leather arm-chair, rather out at elbows, but a snug old chair for all that ; and James would not have parted with that old friend for all the newest *fauteuils* and *chaises longues* that could be found in all the upholsterers' shops in the civilised world. It was almost the last of the links that bound him to his childhood, to the days when, gorgeously attired in a black-velvet frock and a big sash, he used to come down from the upper regions with his brothers and sisters ; and being the delicate hardly reared pet, used to climb up on Sir Hugh's knee, and ruffle his silk-smooth, faultless hair, nestling his head on



that dear kind old shoulder. So it came to pass that he loved the old arm-chair, now that he was no longer any one's pet, nor had ever a loving word spoken to him. At his elbow there stood a little cup with violets in it, at which ever and anon he smelt enjoyingly. Coming, yesterday afternoon, almost dizzy and sick, out of one of his reeking alleys, poisoned by the intolerable stench that had their home there—that emanated especially from a certain rag-and-bone shop he wot of—he had spied these violets lying blue and fresh in a shop-window, and with reckless extravagance had there and then gone in and expended sixpence in the purchase of them. Violets always reminded him of Kate. To be sure, all sweet odours and fair sights did that more or less, but violets most of all; they were her flowers, *par excellence*. Almost always a little bunch of them might be seen lurking green-leaved in the bosom of the soft gray dress. James was reading over his

sermon, a work of some difficulty,—for, like many clever men, he wrote an almost illegible hand, his flow of ideas exceeding his manual power of writing them down,—and, with a pencil between his fingers, was occupied in carefully scoring out anything that appeared like needless repetition or tautology, in lopping off all superfluous ornamentations, in pruning away any small flowers of rhetoric that might chance to have blossomed out. The maximum of matter in the minimum of words appeared to be what he desired. His love, and care, and tendance of his sheep was far too great to run any chance of wearying or sending them to sleep. Not for worlds would he have exceeded the quarter of an hour or twenty minutes that he allowed himself to address them in, nor would he, on the other hand, pander to vulgar taste, debase his scholarship, pollute the purity of his style, by descending to any of the familiarities of expression and grotesqueness of

illustration with which many a preacher seasons his discourses for the palate of the unlettered herd. He had so many things yet to say to those people of his, such a vast number of all-important truths to urge, and some voice from a long way off appeared now to be always impelling, goading him on, whispering, "Make haste, make haste, the shadows are lengthening so fast they will soon seize upon and swallow you up, and your work is not half done yet." Sunday was James Stanley's happiest day by far; perhaps that is not saying much for its blissfulness. He seemed to have more rest of mind and body on that day, a pause and breathing space between life's sharp battles; it seemed as if the world, the flesh, and the devil found greater difficulty in climbing over the borders of that holy time. They did get in, certainly, sometimes in the shape of Kate Chester's image, but not in such strength as on other days; their power was compara-

tively feeble and puny. On Sundays he was able to think more and more undisturbedly of his home, not of his shabby cheap lodgings in Thames-street, but of his real home, where his treasure was laid up ; where his kin were standing waiting for him, watching

“ the slow door,  
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.”

He had clearer visions of it than on toiling work-days. Walking sometimes to church, rapt in high and serious thoughts, he seemed to see in the fleecy clouds the snow-white palaces, the happy seats, where the spirits of the just made perfect were resting, spending the pleasant brief night between Death and Resurrection. Calmly, satisfiedly, they look down on this troublesome world—for eyes so far above can discern that, despite the chaos and the turmoil and the fret, all is rounding to a perfect whole. And then in church, when God's light was streaming, goldenly, through the

highest window, pouring over the heads of His martyrs and apostles and prophets, James, poor and sickly, and earth-stained, felt himself lifted up amongst that glorious company ; and, through the prayers going up like incense, seemed to hear the harpers harping faintly, far away in the azure distance. But to-day a certain restlessness and disturbance had destroyed the even balance, the delicate equipoise of his spirits. There seemed to be some agency at work hostile to holy, still meditation, to musing on lofty themes. He was not even attending to what he was doing. He had unconsciously passed leniently over one or two very slovenly sentences, and had even let stand one passage which exhibited a specimen of the most undeniably slip-shod English. What had come to him ? Had he left undone any duty ? Had he neglected to pour balm on any gaping wounds ? Had he neglected to warn and rebuke any sinner, and try and turn him from the error

of his ways ? In his mind he ran over the little events of the past week. No ; miserable as were his shortcomings and general inefficiency, he had no overt act of negligence or laziness to reproach himself with. What was the matter with him, then ? He could not make it out at all ; it puzzled him all the way to church, as he walked soberly along under his umbrella ; and, as soon as he was in the reading-desk, his eyes, involuntarily, naturally turned to a pew near the door, where, under two blue bonnets, two pretty faces—one rosy, one pale—were usually to be seen every Sunday morning, with devout gravity written on them. Only one blue bonnet was to be seen, only one pretty face, the rosy one ; where was the other, the pale one ? Was it the rain that kept Kate away ? Impossible ! she who was out in all weathers. Was she ill, then ? Heaven forbid ! This question would pop up every five minutes, hard as he tried to keep it down. It would come in

inopportunately in the prayers he was praying so fervently, in the lessons he was reading so reverently and plainly ; and then in his sermon he actually lost his place twice, and bungled atrociously over a passage which he had taken particular pains to polish and work up. He would overtake Margaret after service, he resolved, and ask her what had become of her sister? But after service, as ill-luck would have it, the clerk got hold of him, and inflicted on him some long story, which might just as well have been told any other time as that ; by the time he was released Margaret was full half way home, and it would not do for him to be seen rushing down the muddy street, with unclerical haste, in hot pursuit of a pretty young woman. Well, if there were anything wrong, he should hear of it to-morrow ; till then, he must wait. It would be a good exercise for his patience to have to do so. It was Mr. Stanley's custom to take a solitary walk

every Sunday, after his scant dinner. It was his one recreation, and he enjoyed it. He had no idea of foregoing it to-day on account of the rain. He was not sugar or salt to be melted by a few drops of moisture. But instead of betaking himself as usual, by the shortest cut, to the open country and the fields, some instinct prompted him to-day to wander about the villa-dotted roads that formed the suburbs of Queenstown. As he neared the railway station, which stood at the extremity of these suburbs, James's eye was suddenly caught by a female figure approaching him (an unexpected sight, considering the state of the clouds and the road); a female figure, struggling rather unsuccessfully with a big umbrella, which the wind was doing its best to turn inside out—a female figure with a thick veil down over its face, and a blue bonnet, whose shape and hue seemed very familiar to him, on its head. In fact, in this woman he, with a feeling of conster-



nation ludicrously disproportioned to the occasion, recognised the very Kate Chester, about the state of whose health he had been so needlessly concerned. At the same instant guilty Kate recognised him, with a start of almost as horrified fear as that with which backsliding Balaam first perceived the angel with the drawn sword impeding the progress of his God-forbidden journey. Her first impulse was to turn and flee away like the wind, but in a second common sense made her master this instinct. That course would infallibly excite his suspicions more than any other she could possibly adopt, would cause a hue and cry to be raised after her, before she should be beyond the power of any hue and cry to fetch her back again. So she lowered her unruly umbrella as much as she was able, and, trusting in the disguise of her thick veil, endeavoured to pass him without making any sign of recognition. But to no purpose. He stood right in her path, and with wide-eyed asto-

nishment, uttered the monosyllable "Kate!" She could not well *butt* him with her umbrella, nor yet send him spinning off the pavement into the middle of the sloppy street, as she had done, once, on a previous occasion, so she stopped, perforce too, and answered defiantly, "Well?"

"What are you doing out of doors in all this rain?" asks James, plain-spoken in his extreme surprise, pronouncing each word and syllable slowly and emphatically.

"It's something quite new, your condescending to interest yourself in my goings and comings," says Kate, lifting up her head haughtily, evading the question.

"Where *are* you going, Kate?" repeats James, taking no notice of the sneer with which she had endeavoured to free herself from her dilemma.

"What's that to you?" retorts Kate tartly.

If she can but succeed in insulting him, in putting him on his mettle, in sending him

off wrathful and hurt, and so get rid of him. But he was a man slow to anger; very patient under provocation.

"I know it is no business of mine," he answers very gently. "I know it would be the height of impertinence for me to assume any airs of authority over you; but just think how many years I have known you, just think what old friends we are, and I think you'll forgive me."

"O yes, I'll forgive you, of course," answers Kate, who is on thorns the whole time. "It is too wet to stand still. Good-bye;" and she turns, eel-like, to slip by him. But he does not move. He stands there still, close in front of her; but a slight barrier, one would say, to look at him; but able to hinder her for a few seconds from hurrying to her ruin.

"Kate," he says eagerly, forced on by some secret impulse, as if a power within him were uttering the words, without his consent, almost against his will,—“Kate, I

feel a conviction that you are out on no good to-day. I beg your pardon a thousand times if I do you an injustice, but—but I'd be very grateful if you'd indulge me so far as to tell me where you are going?"

Thus adjured, and driven into a corner, Kate said hesitatingly, with an uncomfortable, unnatural little laugh, "Where am I going? How inquisitive men, and parsons particularly, are! I'm only going for a—for a walk."

"To-day?" interjects James incredulously, looking at the pea-soup fog and the swimming pavement.

"Yes, to-day," answers Kate sharply; "all weathers are the same to me. If I have learned nothing else in that charming district-visiting of mine, I have learnt that."

"Well, then, if you are really going for a walk," replies James, "I suppose I may come with you. I can hold the umbrella

over you at least, and save you that trouble;" and as he utters these words he marvels at his own serpent-like subtlety.

Awkward proposition that for that reckless girl, who is looking forward to the meeting with her dark-eyed lover. But her wits do not desert her. "O dear no," she says, with bitter irony, "I could not think of allowing such a thing for your own sake. You had much better keep to your systematic avoidance of me. You know one cannot touch pitch, and not be defiled. I am not fit company for such as you."

That dart was more poisoned than she that sent it knew of. It went straight to the heart and festered there. "O Kate, if you only knew," began James passionately, but then he stopped himself. That she should misjudge him, misconstrue his actions, was part of his discipline, his punishment, and he must bear it meekly, must carry his cross without making a cowardly

moan about its weight. After a second or two he mastered himself and his pain completely. Very calmly he spoke: "You are deceiving me—I see that. What your motive can be I cannot imagine, and I do not know why I think so, but I feel convinced that you are not telling me the truth."

"Yes, I am," answers Kate, with a sort of *pseudo-frankness*, "at least almost the truth. I *am* going for a walk, but it is only up to the post-office to put a letter in, and I did not think it worth while to give you the trouble of escorting me, for just these half-dozen yards."

"It would not be any trouble," answers James, determinately persistent,—provokingly so, Kate begins to think. "I should enjoy it. Kate, I'll give you leave to call me a fool. It is a whim, a fancy, I know, but I own that it would make my mind much easier if you would allow me to see you safe home to-day."

"You should not indulge in such fancies," answers Kate uncivilly; "it is quite contrary to your principles. No," she went on, trying to imagine herself aggrieved, and justly aggrieved, by him, "no, you shall not come with me. You think you can take me up and put me down just as you please, and I want to prove the contrary to you."

Still he would not be angry, would not leave her to herself, despite all her rudeness to him. His heart clave to her still, by reason of the great love he bore her. Only he flushed a little, pale-faced as he was.

"You are unjust and unkind, Kate," he said, "and that is not like you. Why do you try to throw dust in my eyes? Is it worth while to perjure your soul for such a wretched, trifling object? Have I ever been so hard and censorious to your faults and failings, that you must needs cover them from me with a lie?"

"No," answered Kate reluctantly, look-

ing down, "you have not." And the rain dripped from the points of her umbrella, and thence to her shawl, down which it streamed and trickled in manifold little rills, as she stood there, half remorseful, half impatient, speculating on the chance of her being late for the train.

"Well, then," he urged, thinking he had gained a point, "won't you trust in me? Won't you let me know what is weighing on your mind? There is something, I know—something that kept you from church this morning. Two heads are better than one, you know. How do you know that I may not be able to smooth your difficulties, and make it all plain sailing for you?" So he spoke, persuasively, and utterly ignorant of what her difficulties were.

"I have no weight on my soul," she answers, hating and loathing herself, for all these lies she is driven by his importunity to tell. "I have nothing to confide to you.



It's all spun out of your own imagination, because you meet me out walking, without any ostensible object, on a wet day. It's very good of you to be so anxious about me, though your anxiety is quite misplaced. Poor, dear, good James, I'm afraid I have not been very polite to you," she adds, compunctiously, laying a light hand on his wet sleeve.

He begins then, for the first time, to remember himself—to fear for himself—begins to doubt whether he is not drawing out this conversation for his own enjoyment and delectation. This ten minutes will, he knows, entail on him a harder, tougher struggle and wrestle with his own strict-governed heart than ever to-night.

"Perhaps it is my fancy," he says, at last, doubtfully. "I have no reason to suspect you, and no business to torment you with my suspicions, if I have them."

"You do not torment me," she replies kindly; "only living so much by yourself

you get hipped. I assure you I have no burden on my soul,—at least,” she added, laughing slightly, “except the fear that this letter will not get posted in time;” and she half pulled out an old letter she happened to have in her pocket, skilfully covered the broken seal and post-mark. Women can outwit men. Kate had almost lulled James’s suspicions to sleep.

“I’ll believe you,” he said, smiling, as if a great weight were taken off his mind. “I’ll not bother you with any more of my inquisitive catechism of questions. I’ll not even look which way you go.”

And, in pursuance of this resolution, he turned away from her, down another muddy rain-immersed road, and plodded along it soberly, under his umbrella, as he had been doing before this unexpected encounter. For about three minutes he trudged on, lost in thought, and then he heard the sound of small, hurrying feet, pattering through the puddles, behind him; then the quick

breathing of some one who had run themselves out of breath. He looked round, and behold, come back to him, of her own accord, after having eluded him with so much ingenuity, Kate Chester!

"You did not bid me good-bye," she said, panting, in explanation of her conduct, "and so—and so—I ran after you. I want you to shake hands with me. Good-bye," she went on, as he put out his hand and took hers, "we part friends, do not we? We have not seen much of one another lately, but we have been great friends, have not we, Jemmy? And after this, whatever terrible tales people tell of me—whatever dreadful things you may hear that I have done, O, for the sake of the old days, do not be too hard upon me—don't turn to hate me—for pity's sake don't!"

For the first time he perceived that she was greatly agitated. Through the masking veil he tried to catch a glimpse of her face.

"Kate," he exclaimed very anxiously, "I'm sure I was right. I'm sure you are on the brink of committing some great sin—that you are going to-day to take some step that you can never untake again. I implore of you to tell me what it is."

"No, no," cried Kate incoherently, afraid she had said too much, "I'm not going to take any step. You misunderstand me. I was only speaking generally. You know one never knows what one may be driven to do when one is utterly, entirely hopeless."

"No one can be quite hopeless," replied James, with gentle, earnest chiding, "so long as they are alive on the earth, and within the bounds of God's infinite mercy."

"His mercy is nothing to me," answered Kate, with impatient anguish in her tone, "I'm outside the pale of it."

"Child," cried James, and a look of almost terror flashed over his face at her words, "what makes you utter such insane

blasphemy? Who has been putting such wretched pagan ideas into your head? They used not to be there. O, Kate, Kate! drive them out—do not entertain them for a second.”

“Easier said than done,” answered Kate, with dreary composure. “Nobody has put them into my head; they come of themselves. But, anyhow, I need not tease you with them. I have said my say, so I may as well go.”

“No, no, you must not,” answered James vehemently; “I dare not leave you to yourself. How do I know what mad things you may do in your present state of mind? How do I know that you may not go to shipwreck altogether, for want of a helping hand to save you?”

“If I did go to shipwreck, as you call it,” said Kate gloomily, “who’d care, I wonder? Whose dinner, whose night’s rest would it spoil? Maggie might sigh over it for an hour or two, and Blount for

a minute or two. That would be about all."

"If nobody in the world cared for you," answered James very solemnly, with a holy awe in his clear-shining, honest eyes, "don't you suppose that it would grieve the dear Lord, who shed out His precious life to save you from eternal shipwreck? Do you never think of Him, Kate?"

"Never!" replied Kate emphatically, with a shudder. "It's only you, and such as you, that can think of Him; as for me, I dare not. I used to be able to once, I remember, especially of a Sunday evening, but I tell you I dare not now."

"Why *now*, particularly?" inquired James, catching at the stress she laid on the word "now." "Have you been doing anything to make you feel yourself shut out from partnership in all good and holy things? O, Kate! what have you been doing? Whatever it is, do not fear to tell me. I'm so weak myself, that I must

needs make full allowance for anyone else's weakness."

"Doing?" repeated Kate impatiently, "I've been doing nothing, except what I'm always doing, grumbling and making a fuss about myself, and wishing I was dead. But what do you go on worrying me with your questions for?" she added, with irritation. "You do not believe the answers when I give them you."

"I believe your voice, not your words," answered James gravely, "and they contradict one another."

She made no response for a minute or two. She stood there longing to go—as if obliged to stay—in an agony of doubt. Then to the ears of them silent came the sharp tinkle of a bell at the railway station, the approach of a train, and immediately after the whistle of an engine, some way down the line. Kate came back out of her reverie, with a great start.

"I must go," she said hurriedly. "I

shall be late," she added, forgetting who it was that she was addressing.

"Late!" exclaimed James, excessively puzzled, wondering if she had taken leave of her senses, "what for?" Then a new light dawned on him—a dreadful, lurid light. "I see it all," he said hastily. "I see what you meant, bidding me good-bye in that way. You're going somewhere, going off by this train—going away on some fool's errand."

"How dare you make such unwarrantable accusations?" cried Kate, angry and afraid. "You do not seem to have much of the charity that 'thinketh no evil.'"

"Unwarrantable, is it, Kate?" said James slowly, looking at her keenly. "Then why do I see you glancing towards the station, and perpetually watching that train that is coming up with such anxiety?"

The train was drawing inconveniently near—already it had come full into sight, steaming along the line, with all its many



carriages, and this train never stopped more than about three minutes at Queenstown. Stop dawdling there five minutes longer and she should be late. In a second she took her resolution. "James," she said, stamping determinedly on the dirty road, splashing, thereby, a good deal of mud up on his coat and her own dress, "I will not stand being baited in this way; and there's an end of it. I am going by that train. I tell you so, plainly. I do not know why I was so cowardly as to tell a lie about it before. And go I will; so if you are thinking of trying to dissuade me, I advise you to keep your breath for a more profitable occupation." And, avoiding further argument, as she thought, she set off walking fast towards the station, which was not fifty yards distant.

James would not leave her in this imminent soul-peril; he must make a last effort to rescue her. Keeping alongside of her, he asked her, with as much stern-

ness as he could ever say anything with, "Kate, I know as well as if you had told me that you are going to meet that man. Tell me where."

"I shall not tell you ; it is nothing to you," answered Kate sullenly.

"Child," pursued James, in low, hurried tones, almost suffocated with his excitement, "this is God's own day ; is it a day to do devil's work on ? Is it a day to kill your own soul, utterly, for ever ? In God's name, I command you to desist from this purpose of yours !"

Every word he spoke seemed to stab her ; she could have groaned aloud, but she gave no outward sign. She would be firm—she would not give in. Not even James should stop her from going to comfort her poor, lonely Dare. They reached the station, and Kate went into the book-office, with a firm step, asked for one single first-class ticket to Clapham, got it, and went out on the platform. James stayed

a second behind her and got a ticket too. Then an idea struck him. It would soon be time for afternoon service, and he had not provided a substitute for himself. What a hubbub there would be in Queenstown when he should be found absent without leave! But he must not leave this girl to throw herself over this precipice. His first duty was to drag her back. That path lay clear and plain before him. So he called a porter, gave him a verbal message to the rector (he had not time to give a written one), and sent him off with it. Then his mind felt easier, and he followed Kate out. The train was just alongside; there were not many people to get in or out, for the weather was anything but favourable for travelling. He watched Kate pass along, looking for an unoccupied carriage; and as soon as she found one, got in. Then he followed her. As she turned her face and saw him, an expression of horrified astonishment spread over her features. She

had not calculated on this move. Once in the train she had imagined herself safe from him.

"What do you mean by dogging me like this?" she asked, with concentrated resentment in her low tones.

"I mean," answered he solemnly, "by God's help, to save you, if I can, from yourself, and from the devils that have got possession of you."

"Give it up," she answered with bitter gloom; "it's too hard a job, even for you."

James came and sat down beside her, and said with forced composure, "Kate, you may as well tell me where you are going to meet this—this man. I shall infallibly find out if you do not."

"O, I don't mind telling you," said Kate recklessly, "it can be no secret now. Everybody will know soon enough. At the Crystal Palace, in the court where the statues are. Is that exact enough for you? And if you choose to come too, of course

no one can prevent you, only I warn you that you'll be rather *de trop !*" she ended, with a laugh that sounded rather hysterical.

James was almost struck dumb at sight of the abyss that was yawning at the very feet of this wretched woman whom he loved so. "Child, child," he cried, and his voice shook in the intensity of his pleading, "have pity on yourself! Do not you see that Satan is putting a mist on your eyes, that you should not see this lover of yours in his true shape—not as the monster of wickedness luring you to destruction that he is?"

"He is nothing of the kind," retorted Kate fiercely. "Don't dare to abuse him to me. He is the only person in the world that cares about me," she went on, with something like a sob. "You and Margaret and Blount have, perhaps, got a feeble sort of liking for me, but he does love me really. Bless him, poor darling!"

The part of this speech in which she alluded to his feeble liking for her nearly upset poor sore-tried James. He, in comparison of whose pure, deep, utterly unselfish love (a love which, well-hidden, was killing him by inches), Dare's mad, wild-beast passion was as a stinking stagnant pond to a leaping, pellucid mountain brook.

"Love you!" he echoed with a certain just scorn; "would a man that really loved as a good man should love a woman drag down the object of his love to disgrace and shame of everlasting pollution?"

"Yes," cried Kate, flashing, "when he knows that she is most willing—for his sake most thankful—to be dragged down to any depths. What are disgrace and shame and pollution, as you call it, to me in comparison to him, I should like to know? Nothing but bugbears to frighten children with—nothing but empty names that have no meaning in them."

So she spoke, boldly, confidently, but

her inmost heart said differently. It said, "A lie, a lie !"

"And then when you come to the reckoning," urged James, with the solemn severity of one of God's ministers—one of His vicegerents, whose business it was to reprove and rebuke sin whenever he should meet with it on the earth, — "when you have to pay the price for this mad surfeit of brief pleasures, how will it be then? How will it be when you come to die? Will that wicked man you are going to be able to help, or comfort, or rescue you then?"

"Don't talk of dying," cried Kate, shivering, "I'm young and strong; why should I die?"

"Is it only the old that die?" inquired James very mournfully. "Ah, no; any paper you take up will tell you differently; but even if you live on in your sin to be an old woman, will even that seem a long while? will not it be but as a watch in the

night. in comparison of the countless ages of eternity?"

Kate made no answer; she only covered her face with both hands, and rocked backwards and forwards desolately. The stupendous thought of that eternity (a thought which our weak brains can at their best but hardly support the weight of) almost crushed her, guilty, rudderless as she was, to the dust. Then came the low gentle voice again, not scolding, not upbraiding, trying very hard to be calm, but yet wavering a little in spite of itself.

"Kate, I know this is no time to preach to you in, but let me put it plain and clear before you. Is it wise of you to spend this little space that we call life in sowing the seed of everlasting undying torments for yourself? Of your own choice, too, when you might, in this time that is allotted to you, be laying up for yourself treasures unto life eternal in that heaven that will never fade or vanish away?



Kate, our dear Lord is standing at the door *now*, begging you, imploring you to come in. O child, you won't turn away to hell !"

He stopped, he could not go on, he was so moved.

Kate sat there motionless ; still the hidden face and a sighing sob every now and then.

"Kate," began James again, almost in a whisper, and tears stood full and bright in his eager eyes—eyes with an angel-light in them,—“what shall I say when I see your dead mother again? What shall I say when she asks for her little daughter, the little daughter that she loved so, that she begged me on her death-bed to look after and be an elder brother to? What shall I say to her? O Kate, Kate, I thank God that in His infinite mercy He took away that poor little woman from the evil to come—from seeing this black day. I thank Him from the bottom of my soul !”

Poor Kate, she could not bear that. The mention of her mother at any time made her tears flow freely; how much more now! She pulled out her pocket-handkerchief, threw herself down in the bottom of the railway carriage, and, burying her face in the cushions, wept unrestrainedly, violently, — would have wept her life away if she could. After a while she raised a disfigured haggard face, and said with great difficulty, interrupted and checked over and over again by fast-recurring ungovernable sobs :

“James, if it was only myself I’d give in this minute. I’d go back with you, even now, to the old dreary life, and try to bear it, and be content with it, for *her* sake” (another passionate burst of tears); “but,” she went on, “what would he do, what would become of him? You don’t know how he loves me,” she said, appealing piteously to him. “He is so sad, so terribly desolate and lonely, and he looks so

ill and haggard. O, whatever happens, I must go to him,—I must comfort him, poor, poor, darling Dare!”

Again she flung herself down, and shook and quivered in her mighty emotion.

James left her to herself for a few moments; then he touched her gently on the shoulder. “Do you love this man?” he asked very quietly, looking down pityingly on her.

Kate looked up with dim eyes. “Love him!” she echoed, and she almost laughed in her derision of the absurdity of this question. “Ay, better than you, who do not know what love is, can have any conception of. So well, that the only wish I have left on earth is that he would kill me, so that I might die in his dear arms, and get away from this weary world altogether.”

With a sharp pang James let pass uncontradicted that random reflection on his incapacity of loving. “Well, then,” he

said in a low, firm, impressive voice, "if you do love him, love him truly, love him better than yourself and your own gratification, then, most of all, you'll leave him."

"What!" she gasped.

"If you do love him, I say," went on James emphatically, "if his good, his welfare, are of any moment to you, give him up. Don't you see that you are the bait with which Satan is angling for his soul? As long as you are before him, a stumbling-block in his path, he has not a chance of ever coming back to the light. Your love is the chain with which the foul fiends bind him fastest. O child, child, break the links of that chain, I implore you, and you'll set him free and yourself too."

"No, no," cried Kate, very eagerly, "you mistake; you don't know him. I'm the only hope he has in the world, poor fellow. If he loses me he'll go to the bad altogether. He said he would, and he never breaks his word."

"He said that to frighten you," replied James, with a just indignation at Colonel Stamer's cruel, selfish sophistries. "How could he go more to the bad than living in sin with a woman that is not his wife; with the curse on his soul of having changed a girl once pure, and innocent, and walking in God's faith and fear, into what I daren't name to you, Kate? I hate to talk to you on such a subject," he added, with a shocked, disgusted look, "it seems an insult to do it, and yet I must."

Kate was silent for a few moments; almost torn and rent in twain by the two powers of good and evil that were fighting and hard on the narrow battle-field of her sick soul.

Then she spoke with livid lips. "If it is for his good—O, don't deceive me, and tell me it is, when it is not; don't mislead me from some mistaken idea of doing me good. But if it is for his good—if you put it in that way, I'd do anything

—you know I would; I'd do anything in the world for him. O, my love, my love!" Such an exceeding great and bitter cry.

"Then leave him," urged James, with thrilling earnestness, "give him up! Come home with me, and pray and agonise against this wretched, wicked love, that is desolating your life. Lift up your poor heart to that higher, purer, more satisfying love, that is open to us all. O, Kate, give him up, give him up!"

"Even if I do consent to give him up," said Kate, fighting with a storm of tears, —"O, God, I cannot, I cannot!"

James would not spare her now. It was the decisive moment, and a second's hesitation might lose her for ever. "*You must, Kate,*" he said solemnly, "even if you have the heart to soil and sully the good old name that your poor father tried to keep so clean and bright—even if you have the heart to mar and spoil your brother's and sister's future by your shame

—even if you dare to do this great sin against God, by your love to that man I charge you to give him up, and never see his face again. It is the strongest proof of love that will ever be asked of you. Will you shrink from this thing, Kate, hard as it is, or will you do it?”

“Yes, yes,” cried Kate, violently excited, almost incoherent, “I’ll do it for his sake, as you say. O, poor Dare, poor fellow! But even then,” she went on hurriedly, catching at this last straw, “I must see him once again, to tell him so. O, James,” she said, appealing to him piteously, with her haggard eyes, “I never said good-bye to him yesterday; just think of that. O, I must see him once again. Don’t say no to me; I must hear his voice just once again, that I may have something to live upon afterwards.”

“Heaven forbid!” said James quickly, in horror at this mad proposition. “What! thrust your head between the lion’s jaws of

your own accord? a wise idea, indeed! No, Kate, be a brave girl. Don't palter with this temptation—it is a frightfully strong one, I see. Cast it utterly behind you, and beg of our God (He is very gracious and pitiful) to give you strength to outlive this fiery trial."

Kate struggled up from her crouching attitude in a staggering sort of way, clutched hold of his arm as if for support, and said dazedly, "I—I don't quite understand you. Do you mean to say that I *am never* to see him again—that after all we have been to each other I'm to have nothing more to say to him?"

James took her hand with a brother's tenderness. "Yes," he said very sorrowfully, but resolutely. "Kate, I pity you more than I ever pitied man or woman before, but still I say yes. Poor child," he went on compassionately, "you're blinded and confused now, and are not fit to judge for yourself. Won't you trust in an old



friend like me? Won't you believe me when I tell you solemnly that it's the only thing you can do now?"

"Yes, yes," cried Kate with tearful incoherence, "I'd trust you; I'll do whatever you tell me. But, Jemmy, I do so *long* to see him once again, just for five minutes, to tell him how I love him—I was very unkind and rude to him yesterday; I hate myself for it now—to tell him that I'll never forget him as long as I live, and that it's only for his own good that I am keeping away from him. James, you're not a hard-hearted cruel man I know,—you'll let me do just that much. I shall go mad if you don't."

"No, you won't," said James, trying gently to soothe her; "God will give you strength to endure; I'm confident of that, Kate," he went on with an intensity of earnestness in his tones; "I know of old that you are not one of those feeble, weak-souled women who wince and shrink away from a

little pain. Make up your mind to face this ordeal bravely; and you'll come through it yet, safe and pure, for the sake of the poor dead mother who is watching and waiting for you—for the sake of the Lord who laid down His Deity in such unutterable agonies to save you."

The Lord he spoke of gave him strength to conquer. By his words he vanquished and subdued her utterly.

"There," she said hoarsely, "say no more, you may stop; I'll go home with you, and you may do whatever you choose with me. Only do not say anything more to me, just now, please; leave me in peace that I may face my despair."

So he left her in peace. A few minutes more and the train stopped. James almost lifted Kate out, for she was like a log upon his hands, and with some difficulty helped her to a bench. There she sank down, motionless, nerveless, almost senseless. James was frightened out of his wits. In saving

her soul had he killed her body? He rushed off to the refreshment-room for a glass of water; came back quickly to her with it, and put it to her pale lips. But she pushed it away feebly. She *would* not faint or go into hysterics. She never had done either in the course of her life, and would not begin now. So by a great effort of the strong will, she got the better of a great inclination to tumble off the bench in a swoon; slowly lifted her eyes, dizzy and swimming to his anxious face, and said with difficulty, "No, thank you, Jemmy, I do not want it."

By the next train Mr. Stanley and Miss Catherine Chester returned to Queenstown. All the way back, Kate sat staring, vacant-eyed, apathetic, out of the window, at the quick-passing landscape, not seeing one inch of it—like a woman on whom a stunning blow had just fallen, numbing her senses, like one whose last hope in this world was extinct.

### CHAPTER III.

PEOPLE cannot indulge in such frantic emotions as I have tried weakly to portray in the last chapter without paying for them—paying a good price too. Nature will avenge herself on those who maltreat her so uncalculatingly. For the second time in her life, Kate was struck down by a violent brain-fever. Again for weeks and weeks she lay, hovering on the ill-defined borders of life and death, in a sort of debatable land that hardly belonged to either. Again, in delirious frenzies, she raved about her for-ever-lost Dare ; imagined that he was in the next room ; that they were keeping him from her ; flung herself about, and fought violently, wildly, with her attendants to get to him. Again, after a long, weary

interval, she struggled back into full consciousness, woke up from her fevered dreams, and saw her

“Set gray life”

in its own dull colours—the colours it would always wear henceforth.

After a person has been as much pulled down as Kate had, it takes some time to build them up again. It was by almost imperceptible degrees that she seemed to creep back to health ; but, for all that, creep back she did, surely and safely. The summons had not gone forth for her yet. For many a long hour and day she lay on the green sofa by the fire, wrapped in a white dressing-gown that was hardly whiter than her face, with her great eyes bigger than ever, now full of dreamy, vague speculations. Almost listlessly she thought of Dare, this weary sickness of hers seemed to have interposed such a deep gulf between him and her. Sometimes she thought that she had lost the power of feeling anything ; that

nothing could any more move her to tears or laughter ; that she had used up all her stock of feeling in those two horrible days, that she would gladly have blotted out of her remembrance altogether. Then, too, she used to plan and portion out and plot her future life, making many a resolution which she was as yet too weak to carry out. Sometimes Margaret, or the old servant that had nursed her twenty years ago, would come softly into the still room, would speak gently to her, ask her how she did, and whether she wanted anything, stoop down and kiss her, perhaps, and then go out again as softly, for fear of disturbing her. James came, too, to see her very often, sat by her, and read chapters and bits out of the Bible to her, and sometimes she would listen and say, " Thank you," very gravely, at the end ; sometimes her thoughts would wander off, weakly straying away

" To other scenes and other days,"

or she would drop asleep, and only wake

to find him going ; and to scold herself for her self-indulgence and ingratitude to him.

It was the end of February, and the cuckoo-flowers were beginning to blossom out shyly in the damp green water meadows away down in the country, before she was able to walk about the house in her old, elastic, springy way, before she was restored to full glowing health, before she was quite the same girl that she had been before her seizure. *The same girl*—that is to say, solely as regarded bodily conditions, for as in everything relating to her mental and moral part, it was soon patent to all her friends that she was not by any means the same girl that she had been. There had come upon her a new kind of austerity, a sort of hardness, which, had she been of a different faith, would have made her relish, almost enjoy, the severities and mortifications of such a convent as that of the Perpetual Adoration.

She had lost all belief, all confidence in herself. Since that last passage in her history, she believed herself capable of any crime. What security had she that, in some fresh access of insanity, she might not hurl herself upon ruin, when no one should be by to pull her back? No reins, she considered, could be too strait and tight to curb and check so untamed a soul, no manacles too heavy and close to fetter it. In her convalescence, as soon as jealously-guarding nurses allowed her to make any exertion, to be left to herself for ten minutes—with eager haste she had put away out of her sight, without one regretful sigh, those gay garments with which she had been wont to heighten her beauty ; those simple little ornaments with which she had decked her fair neck and round arms of yore. She had done for ever with the flowers and jewels of life; the thorns must be her portion now, and she would wear them crownwise, round her



brows, and not clamour or complain about the blood they drew. On her past harmless coquetries she looked back as on so many deadly sins, and she could hardly be persuaded to speak civilly to George Chester, because he was connected in her mind with passages of her life, which seemed to her of inexcusable folly and fatuity. It was evident that this exaggerated strictness, sprung from a morbid remorse, could not last. It was only the rebound from her former recklessness. Any one could see that this girl was in a state of transition, though transition to what remained to be proved. Then as to her parish-visiting, and ministering to the sick and needy; formerly, she had gone about this in a very lazy, capricious, dilletante sort of way, tripping about on her errands of mercy, daintily dressed, scattering about, helter-skelter, tracts and religious books, which she had been in the habit of turning into the most complete and thorough

ridicule. She had allowed herself, too, to have favourites among her people, partialities and aversions; and had also thought herself at liberty to avoid dens and holes, where churls lurked, and stench-ramps, unreproved. Then, when she got home, she would devise some becoming new head-dress, would practise some soft little plaintive song, or prepare one or other of the small traps in which she lured that shy bird, man, so successfully. Oftenest of all she would meet George Chester on her homeward way; would carry on a brisk trade in sentimentalities, as she dawdled along with him, and after leaving, would feel mildly elevated at the thought of having done a little mischief. How different it was now! Heart and soul, with all the energies of her body, and all the faculties of her mind, she went into that work, with which she had formerly trifled and played. Her great object appeared to be, that no second of her life should be without occu-

pation. She could not be too ceaselessly busy to keep thought at bay. It was only the happy and innocent, she used to say, that dare sit down with folded hands and be idle. She took James for her model now ; and strove emulously to pull in the same yoke with him. Women are always in extremes ; impetuous, passionate women like Kate, more especially so. No earthly power could get her now to go out to any parties, to make any calls, or pay any of the duties people owe to society. She was not fit to go into society, she would answer gloomily, when urged on this point. If people knew the sort of girl she was, they would not receive her into their houses. A system of flagellation, and fasting five days a week, hair-shirt, &c., would have appeared to her distempered imagination much more suited to her case than any meeting of light-hearted, glad friends. She seemed to think that she could not possibly make her present life too different from her past

one. "You're going regularly through the stages of a Frenchwoman's life," Margaret said, one day laughing to her, "*coquette, prude, dévotée*, only I think you are running the last two into one." Margaret kept religiously to the first. "How different those two sisters are to be sure! no one would take them for sisters." People made that remark, apropos of the Chesters, very often in these days. Different! I should think they were. As different as summer and winter, as sunrise and sunset, as death and life; as different as any two things most opposed to one another in the world. Margaret had made several acquaintances of late; had found reason to modify her unflattering opinion of Queenstown; after all, it was no worse than other places. Beauty was rather at a premium there this winter, which perhaps accounted for the fact of Margaret being received with such open arms in the drawing-rooms of all the green-blinded stucco villas and lodges and

houses. It is a well-known fact that when the moon is not up, the stars shine bright. Now that the moon—to wit, pale Kate—had voluntarily withdrawn herself, that fair star, her sister, had a chance of showing any lustre she might possess. And a fair star she was, shining with a clear, modest, wholesome light, that cheered and illumined, though it did not dazzle. One or two adventurous individuals succeeded in getting up half-a-dozen balls and soirées in these bleak months; and on these occasions Miss Chester made quite a sensation. Numberless gentlemen appertaining to the War Office, the Treasury, &c. &c., never seen in daylight without the encumbrance of disfiguring black bags, at night, freed from these impediments, whispered soft nothings to her under the gaslights. Yes, all was smooth and smiling before her, though it was only little trifles that made it so.

With no great grief cold at her heart, with no evil deed on her soul, with a plea-

sant face, a fairly quick wit, and a sweet temper, as women's tempers go—what more could a young woman want? But this young woman had her annoyances and grievances too, though she did not kick and scream about them. She was not by any means sure that the romance of her life would end happily, though perhaps nobody might find out that there was anything particularly tragic about it. The hero of it had not as yet behaved in so satisfactory a manner as the heroes of any of the dog-eared novels at the circulating library. The four Chester girls (they always congratulated themselves on being four, because their friends could not call them the Graces) fired many small arrows of good-humoured ridicule at Kate, on her first entering upon her new *rôle*. They thought it only a passing whim that she could be easily laughed out of. But they might as well have aimed their darts at the tough hide of a hippopotamus. So they

found out ere long ; and, being sensible, good-natured young women, went their own way, and let her go hers unmolested ; even helping her now and again with old clothes and broken meats for those poor folk in the tendence of whom she was now so completely wrapped up, to all appearance at least.

And James—how did this new phase in Kate's history affect him ? What was he doing now ? How was he getting on ? Doing ? He was doing what one told us all to do many, many years ago—what very few of us do—"crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts." Getting on very surely and bravely with his work ; feeling somehow (now particularly after having been permitted to rescue Kate) that it was more than three parts done, though the battle still seemed at its hottest. Getting on so as not to be taken unawares by the Great Reaper, whose harvesting time is all seasons of the year.

And did he keep to his old line of conduct, and eschew Kate's society—keep clear of her in her sore need? Not he. That would not have been like him. He saw plain that *now* duty led him towards her, instead of, as formerly, away from her; and wherever the pilot star of duty shone, there he would do his best to follow it, even if it led him over quaking morasses and through thorny brakes. Hand in hand, like brother and sister, they went forth to that labour they had set themselves; there would never be any estrangement between them again. Every day they were together, often for hours, and yet no one ventured to mention the name of marriage or love-making in connection with them.

It was twenty times harder now for James to contend against that old enemy, his single-hearted devotion to Kate, than ever before, when, by the aid of his system of absenting himself, he had nothing but memory and imagination to torment and



harass him. Now, every day a thousand little trifles—almost invisible, imperceptible, singly, but together an armed host—fed and nourished his deep affection. Kate was not the same girl either that she had been—not the gay, sparkling, witty Kate Chester, who had seemed a being of another sphere. Now she was grave and mournful like himself; far graver and more mournful indeed; for as yet there was no serenity, no restfulness in her melancholy. How he longed often to be able to say something that would comfort her; would bring back the old smile to the set white features! I think her religion did not make her happy. No one ever heard her joking now, or making little witticisms; very seldom she laughed. Perhaps it might have been said, as of another, with truth—

“One face, remembering his, forgot to smile.”

Since the service James had rendered her (sometimes even now she caught herself longing that he had not rendered it;

longing sickly to have Dare back at any price) —since then, I say, she had trusted in him wholly, had leaned on him, had gone to him in all her difficulties ; called him her dear, good, old Jemmy—her one friend ; had laid bare her whole heart before him. It was very, very hard for him to keep his great love out of every word and look ; but, hard as it was, he did it. Not once, while life and strength gave him power to conceal it, did she guess at its existence.

“Tis a month before the month of May,  
And the spring comes slowly up this way,”—

came up, not borne on the strong wings of loud, blustering, health-giving March winds ; not lit by a broad-faced, jocund, spring sun ; but creeping in with fog and rotting mist, and low-hanging clouds and ceaseless rain, bearing malaria in its wet bosom.

One afternoon Margaret Chester, returning from an almost diurnal visit to her cousins at Grove House, came hastily up the stairs and into the drawing-room of

their own little cottage. Here she found Kate sitting by the table, leaning her head on her hand ; for a wonder, doing nothing. She flung herself down into an arm-chair, pulling off her hat, and said impatiently :

"There's no use talking—I cannot bear it much longer."

"What?" asked Kate, looking up, heavy-eyed.

"Why, this fever, to be sure ; it's spreading like the plague."

"Ah!" said Kate.

"The Chesters have just been telling me," continued Maggie, "that that wine-merchant's daughter in Queenstown—that pretty girl that George pointed out to us one day—is just dead of it."

"Is she really?" said Kate, with a shocked intonation of voice.

"Yes, indeed," replied Margaret. "She was quite well the day before yesterday, walking about on the Parade, and last night she was dead."

"Poor thing!" murmured Kate softly. "It was a sudden message she had sent her."

"It will get into your district next," went on Margaret very discontentedly; "as sure as possible it will; those low, crowded parts so close to the river-side."

"Two cases have broken out there already," remarked Kate quietly; "so I found out to-day. I did not know it before I went there."

Margaret jumped up in a second, and put the length of the room between them.

"And you have actually come back here," she said, with horror, "to bring the infection to me! I never heard anything so inhuman."

"I knew you would be in a dreadful fright," answered Kate, almost smiling in her slight scorn; "so I took the precaution of changing all my clothes."

"Of course you'll not go near them again, now you do know," proceeded Mar-

garet, a little reassured by this information.

"You could not be so mad."

"I'll take a lodging in Queenstown if you like," replied Kate, pushing her hair wearily off her low, wide brow. "Indeed I think I had better, on account of you and the servants; but I certainly could not be so cowardly as to desert them, poor creatures, now of all times, when they want me so much more than ever."

"I do not know what people mean by throwing away their lives in such a way," grumbled Margaret, angry with the fever, angry with the people who had caught the fever, angry with Kate, angry with everything and everybody. "It would be all very well to be so prodigal if one had two or three lives to spend."

"Two or three lives!" exclaimed Kate involuntarily. "What a frightful idea!"

"Why, I'd have twenty, if I could, or twenty times twenty," said Margaret, with animation.

"And I would never have had half a one if I had had the choice," answered Kate gloomily.

Silence then for a few minutes. Kate leaning her elbow listlessly on the table, still fiddling, white-fingered, with Dare's locket (the one last remnant of him that she could not tear from her heart even yet). Margaret tapping her foot impatiently on the floor, flinging eau-de-Cologne in a wide circle all round her, as a sort of disinfective. Then she spoke again in a fume:

"It is getting nearer every day; why it is not a hundred yards from our own door now!" and she wrung her hands in her panic.

"To every man upon this earth  
Death cometh soon or late,"

said Kate, with serious composure.

"Everybody is leaving the place but us; everybody except the doctors and the undertakers," continued poor Margaret.

"O," said Kate.

"The Chesters are going Monday week; they cannot get off sooner, or they would," went on Maggie again; "going down to stay with an aunt of theirs in Kent."

"Are they?" said Kate indifferently.

"I wish to goodness I was going with them," cried Margaret, exasperated at the little impression her pieces of news made.

"It is a great pity that you cannot induce them to ask you," replied Kate drily.

"Ah, but they have," said her sister triumphantly. "They did to-day, all of them—begged me."

"And why on earth did not you say yes?" asked Kate, opening her large eyes in mild surprise.

"O, because I would not settle anything till I had seen you," returned Maggie.

"Seen me?"

"Yes, they want you to come too; they told me to tell you so; and you will, won't you?" Maggie, as she spoke, came over to

the table, and put her hand pleadingly on Kate's shoulder.

"No, I shall stay here," answered Kate quietly.

Not much use to try and move her when she spoke in that tone; as well try to lift up one of the old recumbent giant blocks at antiquity-defying Stonehenge with your finger and thumb.

"And catch the fever," suggested Miss Chester, aghast.

"Well?" said Kate, shrugging her shoulders in the old devil-may-care fashion.

"And die of it," proceeded Maggie, trying to add blackness to the picture she was painting.

"I do not suppose it is a particularly painful death," said Kate indifferently. "I suppose it is only that you are very hot, and troublesome, and noisy, for two or three days, and then very cold, and very peaceable, and silent for ever."

"Ah, it is all very fine to be so stoical



about it now," cried Maggie indignantly; "but let it come close to you, it will be the old fable of the old man carrying the bundle of fagots. You would not be so *nonchalant* then."

"Perhaps not," said Kate calmly; but to her own heart she said that to her death would be "like a friend's voice, from a distant field, calling."

A few more days went by, cheerless, as if a curse had fallen upon those fair fat Thames banks. Fed by the fog, and the river mist, and the warm drizzle, the fever shot up like a tropical plant, from an infant into a full-grown giant. Scorching, livid-faced, it stalked and ramped stealthily among the reeking crowded courts and alleys. In and out of the red-roofed old houses went Death, laying a finger upon such as he chose for himself, as a woodman walks through the forest, marking the trees that must fall beneath his axe. One evening Kate returned very late, past seven

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o'clock, and came into the room, after a long day's work, languidly, very white-faced, very grave, very tired. Margaret was already dressed for dinner, lounging in an arm-chair by the fire, trying to read, but unable, through the fast-coming thoughts that pressed on her brain.

"Kate, it really is too bad of you," she began fretfully, as her sister entered; then she broke off suddenly, "Good gracious, child, how ill you look!"

"I'm not ill," answered Kate rather faintly, tumbling down on the sofa; "I'm only rather knocked up, and headachy, after being so long in those close stuffy rooms."

"You'll be catching your death in your absurd quixotism, as sure as you sit there," cried Maggie, sitting upright in her chair, with glowing cheeks and eager eyes.

"Catch a fiddlestick," said Kate rather crossly, from among the cushions, for she had heard something like this once or twice before.

"Well, all I can tell you is that every soul is leaving this pestiferous place," said Maggie warmly. "Only an hour ago I met Mrs. Walton, and she told me they were as busy as possible packing up, to be off to-morrow."

Kate rose up suddenly, and stood by the fire.

"Maggie," she said resolutely, "you shall go too. You are miserable here, and there's nothing to keep you. You shall go."

"What! and leave you?" interjected Maggie.

"Yes; you shall go down into Kent with the Chesters, on Monday. You know you will be as happy as the day is long with them; and the country air will do you no end of good, and—George will be there." So she ended, with a slight, good-natured smile. To herself she appeared now about a hundred years old; felt quite a grandmotherly interest—or rather, perhaps the

interest that a disembodied spirit looking down from above might be allowed to feel—in her elder sister's heartaches and love troubles.

"And you?" asked Margaret, with a pleased blush.

"O, I shall do very well," answered Kate lightly.

"If you can do very well here," persisted Margaret, "of course I can too."

"No," said Kate, "that does not follow. I have not got that horror and dread of this complaint that you have, so I'm safer than you, for that predisposes a person to catch it. No, say no more about it, go you shall; I've settled that."

"But," remonstrated Margaret, "suppose you were to be laid up here, all alone, with not a creature near you, how desolate you would be! Just fancy?"

"I shall not be laid up," answered Kate confidently; "at least I do not feel as if I should. Why, I have only just tumbled

out of one fever, and it is not very likely I should tumble into another immediately afterwards. However, if I do, I do, and there's an end of it."

The Miss Chesters were not demonstrative in their affection towards one another, but now Margaret came over to her sister and kissed her. "Kate," she said, in a pained voice, "you're so young and so pretty. Why do you care so little about living? It's very sad to see you now, after what I remember you."

"And yet I would not have the old days back if I could," said Kate, shaking her head.

"What! not the old days, when we played with the doll's house, and had bread-and-treacle in the nursery, and planned what we should do when we grew up?"

"No," replied Kate firmly. "Johnson always said that there was not a week in his life that he would have over again, and I agree with him, only I go farther. I say

that there is not a day nor an hour in my life that I would have over again."

"What! do you mean to say that you would not have it come over again, to be spent exactly as you did spend it; or that you would not have it, even if, with the advantage of your present experience, you might be allowed to spend it differently?"

"O, I don't know about that," said Kate thoughtfully. "It would be a great gift if one could be allowed to put one's remorse and repentance into action. It is its utter futility which is the great sting of remorse; that's its essence indeed. Good heavens! how differently I'd live my life if it were to be given into my hands again!"

"You're not singular in that," said Maggie, sighing; "I expect we all feel that, more or less."

"How different I'd be to mamma," went on Kate, looking very sadly into the fire, "if God would give her back to me—

at least I think so now. I daresay if I had her again I should be just as undeserving of her as I was in the old days."

"Kate, Kate, you're getting morbid with the dreadful life you're leading," cried her sister, pained. "You'll send yourself melancholy mad if you feed upon such thoughts."

Kate did not heed her.

"I lie awake so often at night," she said softly, with the tears coming dimly into her eyes, "thinking how I long to see her, if only for a minute, to tell her how sorry I am ; to tell her how I miss her."

"She knows, I'm sure," said Margaret earnestly, "without your telling."

"No, she does not," answered Kate despondently. "I am certain she is not permitted to know anything about me. It would mar her perfect beatitude if she were. I'm not the same girl she left me."

"You're a much better girl," said her

sister stoutly ; “you’re too good by half, I think. But what is the use of dwelling on such gloomy themes ? ‘Let the dead past bury its dead.’ It is the present we have to do with, and quite enough, too, I think.”

“Yes, that’s true enough,” Kate answered with dejected acquiescence ; and she went on gazing into the fire, as though she could read her future history in its little flaming chambers. Then, after an interval, she spoke suddenly, “Maggie, I’m going to make my will.”

“What ! at two-and-twenty, and outlive all your legatees ! Absurd !” said her sister derisively.

“It seems to me that people die full as often at twenty-two as at seventy-two. What is that song I so often hear you singing, about the reaper whose name is Death, that

‘Reaps the bearded grain at a breath,  
And the flowers that grow between’?

I think the flowers are the easiest mown down of the two.”



But Margaret pooh-poohed it.

"It is the exception, not the rule. It is contrary to the course of nature."

"Very likely; but you know we are not a long-lived family. A white-headed Chester is rather an anomaly. And judge for yourself. Do I look a woman likely to last into the *eighties*? I live too quick to live long. Why, even now I'm not unlike a corpse set upright on a chair. I should have done for a *memento mori* at an Egyptian feast."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said her sister indignantly.

"Yes, I should; but that's neither here nor there. What I wanted to say to you is, that I should be very much obliged to you if you would not try any longer to dissuade me from this way of life I have taken to. It'll do no good."

"I cannot help it," said Margaret, "it seems so unnatural."

"I wonder you cannot see that it is the

only course of life for me to take to now. I feel that. It is the only thing that keeps me from some great crime. I'm so enormously wicked, that unless I'm bound hand and foot, I'm sure to rush to my ruin, as I have been so near doing twice already."

"But it seems such a throwing away of yourself."

"I'm thrown away already. I've done that for myself. I am done for altogether. But even if I were not, there could be no throwing away of oneself in making it one's prime object to take the kingdom of heaven by violence. It's the only way I shall ever take it, if I do."

"I do not see how you would not have every bit as good a chance of getting to heaven without cutting yourself off from all your relations and old friends and ways of life, without isolating yourself so completely." Thus Margaret spoke with a certain sisterly anger.

"Why, Maggie, even if I did not isolate

myself, as you call it, circumstances would soon do it for me."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, before long I shall stand quite alone in the world—rather remarkably so for so young a woman. I shall have a sort of premature old maid's fate come upon me."

"Why?"

"Why, indeed! How can you ask? Just look at Blount. What am I now to him in comparison of what I used to be? Now that he's in the army, and has got new interests, new friends, new views altogether, what is a sister's society to him? I shall see him, I suppose, henceforth for a week at a time occasionally, like any other friend. That will be all. It seems to me that all the ties of my childhood, all the links that bind me to the dear old days when I was so happy, when I used to look forward to such a different future, are falling away from me as fast as they can."

"And, meanwhile, what am I to be doing?"

"O, you'll marry, of course. Ah! you may shake your head; but you will. It's the natural order of things. And you'll have children growing up about you, making you very happy and very miserable; you'll get matronly and staid and careworn, when I have been lying for many a long day in some quiet churchyard (not here, I hope—I hate town churchyards—but somewhere away down in the country), in a green grave, all by myself. And perhaps you'll have a Kate among your children, and will fancy sometimes that her eyes or her hair or her smile are like the sister's that's gone. I feel so weak to-night; I could cry over my own maunder; shed tears of feeble self-pity at my own tomb. Maggie, you will be a happy woman, there's no doubt of that."

"Great doubt, I think."

"You'll marry George Chester; I know

that. Not just yet, perhaps, but all in good time. And you'll make him much happier than I could ever have done—I, whose love is a curse, not a blessing; and he deserves to be happy. He is a good, brave, honest gentleman."

"Never, never!"

"And before you do marry and leave me, I want to arrange my few little affairs, make my will, and that sort of thing, so that there may be nothing to hinder me in the execution of a project which I have in my head."

"What is it?"

"O, you'll know soon enough. It would be premature to explain it now."

"I hope it is that you intend to marry someone yourself. You're too bewitching—though I'm not much in the habit of paying you compliments too; formed for sending men wild about you—to be left to 'braid St. Catherine's tresses.'"

"It's nothing about marrying. The

word 'marry' might be erased from the dictionary, from existence, for all it will ever have to say to me. No. Don't ask me any more questions. I won't tell you anything about it now."

And so the subject dropped.

On the day but one after, Miss Chester, after many futile entreaties to her sister to go with her, took her departure from Cadogan-place. Went away jubilant with her cousins from the fog, and the fever, and the ever new stories of dying people, and the frequent funerals; off into the breezy country to damson-trees in blossom, and larks singing their hearts out, and all the other delights of showery, feathery April. Kate went with her to the hall-door, bid her good-bye very calmly (Maggie, by the bye, cried a little, the circumstances of this parting being peculiar, and rather impressive), and then went back slowly to the drawing-room, feeling, despite herself, rather lonely and deserted; obliged to acknowledge

that, whatever she might say to the contrary, there was yet left in her a capacity for being bored. She drew a chair to the fire, thanked Providence mentally that Tip was not afraid of infection, but still sat there winking gravely as of yore, stroked his white head, and prepared to indulge in a quarter of an hour's musings before she set off on her afternoon's labours. Away she drifted into a sea of thought; but punctually at the end of the quarter of an hour she drew her soul back again from the regions of fancy into the chill land of reality, jumped up without giving herself a moment's law, put on her out-door things, and, laden with her usual supply of beef-tea and jelly and cool drinks, went forth bravely to her unsavoury work. At one of the plague-stricken houses she met James Stanley (these were the sort of scenes that were always throwing them together now), and after a brief conversation, despite all his anxious remonstrances, she

resolved on and declared her resolution of staying there all night, watching beside the sick man, so that his poor worn-out wife might get a little respite and refreshment in sleep.

"Why should I spare myself?" she asked, in answer to his objection, looking up with her large sad eyes. "Have not I got youth and strength? What were they given me for but to use? How do I know how long they may be left to me?"

"Youth and strength are great gifts, Kate, not to be lightly thrown away. Don't be extravagant of them. Husband them, that you may not wake up some day to find yourself bankrupt in them."

"They'll last my time, James ; but I'm not wasting them. I'm spending them very economically. How often have you told me yourself that one can never waste anything in God's service !"

He could not answer her to that. That



speech was so much after his own heart—in his own style. This was the first occasion on which Kate stayed out all night. Hitherto, hard as she had worked, she had always gone home in the evening, her sister's presence had necessitated that; but now that she was gone, there was nothing to prevent Kate wearing herself out as fast as ever she chose. There was no mother or kinswoman to hinder her. So all through the watches of that long night she kept her dreary vigil in a little squalid room, lit by one flaring tallow-candle, alone with a dying man. It was a great ordeal for a delicately-nurtured young girl, and she certainly was very much frightened, particularly at first. Superstitiously she fancied that she heard death-watches ticking; one minute gave a violent start of fright, because her patient moaned or moved uneasily, dreading lest he should become violently delirious, struggle and fight, as she had seen people do in such paroxysms (she a weak woman all alone

there to cope with him); the next minute longed for him to stir, to do anything to break the awful stillness, to prove that he was not dead. Then she tried to read the Bible, turned to the most comforting soothing parts (the grand denunciations of the Prophets would have set her mad in her present frame of mind); but the lines danced up and down, swam before her eyes in the dim light of the one guttering tallow-candle, and the words knocked at the door of her brain in vain, and found no admission. Next she became arithmetical, counted every single thing in the room, multiplied the bedposts by the rungs and legs of the two rickety chairs, and subtracted them all from the drab-and-yellow squares of the tattered paper: that really took some time doing, and was not uninteresting.

Morning came dawdling in at last, and the slipshod rag-wife came back and resumed the care of her lord, and Kate—good, religious, miserable, sleepy Kate—

138      NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL.

went home by the chill gray river, and did not throw herself in as a present to the fish, though sorely disposed so to do.

## CHAPTER IV.

SPRING is one of the best things this world has to show us. No doubt of that, I think. We do not need all the poets that have written—from Homer, the morning star of song, downwards generally, nor Thomson in particular—to tell us that. It is a good gift, even when one possesses it only in a dull London square, walled in with tall smoke-blackened houses, with only a few dingy trees in the middle, which the dust turns brown as soon as ever they have attempted to put on their green mantle, and perhaps one or two crippled-looking laburnums that refresh the passer's eye with their

“Dropping wells of fire.”

Spring is desirable, joy-bringing, even in

the suburban villa. Not even stucco and cockneyism can rob her of all her charms. How much more delicious is she, though, when seen in her true home, where she is born, the blessed country, where one can look up straight to the blue sky and see God's azure vault undimmed by any of the foul smoky clouds of man's own manufacture—can gaze up

“Where, through a sapphire sea, the sun  
Sails like a golden galleon!”

My soul sickens with longing when I think of a roomy country-house, with the dignity of a century or two about its stout old walls, clambered round by roses, with fresh lawns, with well-tended myriad-coloured garden squares, with rooks cawing clamorously about it, giving one a loud good-morrow; with broad fields full of lambs cantering clumsily about on their big unwieldy legs; with clucking hens and little round yellow balls of velvet chickens.

Amongst all these delights was Miss Chester now, and revelling in them. She had got a colour like a dairymaid, and was growing *embonpoint*.

If ever it is pardonable, possible, to forget the existence of Death, it is in a gay country-house filled with lively youngish people in the spring-time. There is nothing to remind one of destruction or decay. None of the servants or acolytes of the great king are near to give one a hint of his presence. For a time he is shrouded from mortal sight—not a desirable condition. Better to think of him a little every day—better to look him in the eyes very often; and then, when he does come in all his pomp of terrors, he will wear the aspect, not of a complete stranger, but of an intimate acquaintance—almost a friend.

Some good man—who was it? I forget—advises all men, when they compose themselves to sleep every night, to fancy

themselves lying stiff and stark in their coffins. Not unwholesome, I think, nor very revolting, when one accustoms oneself to it.

But to return. In spring everything is full of life and sap and vigour; everything is on the increase, nothing on the decrease. Last year's leaves have vanished, lost shape and substance utterly, and only serve now to deepen the tint of the rich soil, to fertilise the fat meadows. For a few weeks we imagine we can feel the sensations which, in a far higher, more perfect degree, our first parents revelled in in their garden between the four eastern rivers.

There was a large company assembled in this month of May in that pleasant Kentish manor-house — people old and young, clever and dull, ugly and pretty, talkative and silent, as in all such mixed gatherings; only somehow it seemed that the preponderance of the young, the pretty,

and the witty over the old, the ugly, and the stupid was greater than is ordinarily the case. Perhaps it was only that the spring had got into their blood and warmed them up into beauty and animation. What a contrast it was to that life in the little narrow house in Queenstown, with only one face beside the still hearth; Kate's firm white features, that seemed to have lost the power of smiling, marked with so settled a gravity, so unalterable a dejection! What a contrast to the tainted air, the heart-rending tales of families decimated, the few people seen about, and those few so often black-clothed, in sign of some recent bereavement; the church-bell tolling incessantly, and the unavoidable sight of mourners and hearse-plumes and mutes whenever you moved outside your own gates!

Maggie shuddered, looking back upon it, and thanked her stars devoutly that she was out of all those horrors. Her host and hostess were not young people—at



least their bodies were not—but they possessed quite as strong faculties of enjoyment, quite as keen a zest for amusement, as when they had run wildly after hoops and found delight in the gyrations of a humming-top, at the age of six years. It was a very easy *laissez-aller* untroubled life that they led in their old stone hall, and that they expected their guests to lead too. A late breakfast, flower-and-fruit garnished, lengthening out deep into the morning; people straggling down one after another, as seemed good to them, not oppressed by any sense of punctuality expected of them, not hurried down from a half-finished hasty toilette by a clamorous bell summoning them.

The squire was a calm-tempered old gentleman, in whom fussiness was not, who liked to get his own breakfast comfortably at the time he had been in the habit of eating it for the last sixty years, and did not much mind when his visitors got theirs,

or whether they did not get it at all. A short forenoon, easily got through by the help of dawdling in conservatories, reading newspapers, writing letters, &c. Then luncheon, chiefly a female one, for such as could muster appetite for it, which, it must be allowed, required some *finesse* and management. A long all-golden afternoon — not a bit too long though, thanks to horses and carriages, to balls submitting to be knocked about *ad lib.*, and to mallets, well wielded, knocking them; but, most of all, thanks to rowings on the big pool, where the large-bolled elms dipped their broad leaves continually into their cold bath, where weak-armed young girls, tyros in the art, sawed the air with disobedient oars, and caught countless crabs, being ridiculed therefor by strong-armed expert young men. Everybody assembling from the four quarters of that small world to a sociable dinner, at an hour late enough for the chandelier to be lit, for the women

to escape the ordeal of having their necks and arms submitted to the hard test of day's piercing eye. But cheeriest of all, the part of those days on which, in after time, those young people looked back with most regret were the evenings. Sometimes they danced in the old hall, and the scutcheons and family-pictures looked down upon them benignantly; while the plainest and most good-natured of the girls—those two attributes very often go together—played waltzes and quadrilles by the hour, and was as often forgotten and done out of her meed of gratitude as not. Sometimes they sang glees and catches and all manner of part-songs—some in time, some out—but all with hearty good-will, and with all the power of their lungs.

Lastly, sometimes they played games suited to the capacity of an infant; games in which bodily agility was more required than any ingenuity of mind; when the furniture was apt to get upset a good deal,

and in which the grand object appeared to be to effect a collision between two bodies coming violently together on one chair, or some other end equally recondite and desirable. But most young people have a taste, developed or undeveloped, for romping; and there is not much harm in it. To amuse themselves was people's first waking idea in that house and many like houses, and their grand object through the day; and whether they had amused themselves or not, their last question to themselves at night. Nowhere was Time made to die a sweeter, more painless death. But yet among the flowers, even of that Eden, a serpent lurked for one person, perhaps for many; but it is only with the serpent appointed to sting one particular individual that we have to do. George Chester had not, as had been expected of him, accompanied his sisters and his cousin into the country. He had seen them safely to their journey's end, and had then appeared to

think that he had done his duty by them; had left them, and gone off to amuse himself, after his own fashion, in town. His defection was a great disappointment to one of those young ladies, and mortified vanity did not help to sweeten the sourness of it. "There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," says the proverb; and there were plenty better fish, better-looking fish, more valuable fish altogether, than George Chester at this very house; but still silvery salmon, speckled trout, cod, and haddock might all swim finnilly by; they could not compare, in her blinded eyes, with the dull carp she was hankering after. When she had been away from home about three weeks, George made his appearance one day; came walking over the grass, in all his pristine beauty and plumpness, as they were playing croquet. It was rather a fortunate moment for Margaret, she was looking so undeniably pretty, flushed, excited, with eyes which, now that they were not

seen beside Kate's, might pass for very bright ones. The flush deepened for a second when her glance fell upon the newcomer, then died away utterly. It surprised and almost shocked the girl herself to discover how pale she was getting, how the few words of ordinary greeting seemed to stick in her throat. Absence in her case had certainly and unfortunately made "the heart grow fonder." And then, what made it worse, he was so provokingly cool and unembarrassed, shook hands with her so cordially, said quite loud, with no pretence at whispering or undertones, "Well, Maggie, how are you? Why, you are as white as a sheet!" and then passed on to shake hands with his sisters, in apparently exactly the same way, and stayed talking to them, asking questions about home matters, and answering their inquiries about himself, without another glance towards the place where she stood.

Poor thing! she could have killed her-

self in her shame for blushing or paling about such a block. As well blush about Cheops or Rhamses, for all the return he made for it. It was too true that Maggie felt, and could not help feeling, an amount of interest, very disproportionate to his deserts, in that uninteresting young man. She had let her heart go out to him. The two feeble strings of prudence and caution, with which she had held it back, snapped off suddenly one fine day, and she could not call it back again now, much as she wished; it had passed beyond her control. Women, nice women especially, do not proportion their love to the worth of the recipient; often the love and the worth are in an inverse ratio. Love is an inmate who creates a great deal of confusion and disorder in the house he tarries in; he does not let his entertainer have much peace or quietness. Love does not make people enjoy their food, or take deep draughts of sleep. Margaret did not in these days draw half the enjoy-

ment she ought to have done out of the rides and the dancing and the love-making; for love-making there was, of course.

I wonder everybody did not make love to everybody else—opportunity and impportunity being everything. My marvel was, and always is, in such cases, how all the young men and all the young women avoided falling into hopeless entanglements. The season spoke of nothing but love; and it was the sole thing to do in that lazy time and place. It is not a pleasant thing to get into the habit of studying a fellow-creature's countenance, and putting constructions which torture yourself ingeniously upon each change of expression. Maggie made herself very miserable sometimes if George happened to look grave for two minutes, imagining that he was thinking of Kate; and then again, if he smiled without any apparent cause, of course he was thinking about Kate. Then only the subject had presented itself to him in a different and a



brighter light. Often she lay awake at night, pondering over this young man's foolish commonplace speeches; weighing them, one after another, to see what they were worth, and whether they had the ring of true metal about them. It is occupation equally unpleasant and profitless (as many a jealous wife could testify) watching another's actions. All the watching in the world will not avail to keep a person from the most obnoxious courses, if they have a bent for such courses. Such vigilance is either totally inoperative, or else aggravates the evil. But still, it is very hard to abstain from it. For two or three days at a time now, the whole treasure of George's fickle affections seemed diverted to some other of the girls staying in the house. His roving fancy was caught by a fair cheek, a sparkling smile, or a rose-bud mouth. It did not take much to snare him, certainly; but then he always got out of the toils again very, very soon. More than once Margaret

caught glimpses of him between the orange-boughs in the conservatory, making such *yeux doux* that she felt morally certain he must be accompanying them with words more than sentimental. Now and again she had overheard him (unintentionally, of course) deep in the gibberish of the language of flowers. And on such occasions she would close her lips very tightly and thinly on one another; would twist her hands together under the table, and make random answers to whoever addressed her.

And then again, Mr. George, more inexcusably perverse than ever, would sometimes get hold of some man friend, and, falling deep into talk upon rifles, or pointers, or salmon-flies, or some such manly themes, not come near her all the evening. Every day, and every hour of the day, her reason told her that there was nothing to worship, nothing of the demi-god about this commonplace young officer; not an inch of hero stuff in all his composition.

But passion, inveterate in her infatuation, would not hear a word in dispraise of her idol. Sitting brushing her hair at night, after one of these unsatisfactory evenings, she would resolve and vow henceforth to hate and despise him: firstly, for what he was; secondly, for what he did: for being such a noodle as regarded the other half of creation; and for his obtuseness, in neither perceiving nor heeding the good things Providence put in his way. But the hatred was spurious, and the opposing love was genuine, and it always won the day. Truly, the bed of roses on which she was lying had a good many thorns in the blossoms. Men are so conceited, that I think he saw that she loved him. And what did he think about her? A question of some moment to the unlucky young lady. O, he thought her the jolliest girl he had ever seen except one. That unlucky "except." After all his vagaries he invariably returned to her; but then his vagaries were so very, very frequent, and

the intervals between them so brief. For some time he endeavoured to please himself, trying to trace a likeness between Margaret and her absent sister; tried to find out some lurking resemblance in a smile or the tone of a voice: in eyes or other features it would have been evidently absurd to seek for such. But he failed utterly. There was not one grain of similitude between the two. As I have before remarked, hardly any two young women in Europe could have been more unlike. There was not a vestige of that general family likeness which is to be found among most sisters. Afterwards, George got gradually to care for and enjoy those smiles and tones for themselves. He was not a Stoic, nor of a particularly faithful turn of mind, to be utterly indifferent to a rather sweet woman, blushing and trembling at his approach. It made his opinion of himself go up a peg or two higher. I think it was because he felt so secure of her, that he was in no hurry to make assu-

rance doubly sure. And yet, if Kate had been dead now, and he had had a month or so to get accustomed to the idea of her being defunct, he, not being the sort of man to mourn long for a recollection, to widow himself for life for an idea, would have found it in his heart to gift Margaret with royal happiness by condescending to offer her his hand. But Kate was not dead nor dying, nor, as far as appeared, engaged to anyone else. Consequently, why should not she be engaged to him? After all, she had never refused him. Perhaps that dismissal of him from the office of escort was a little ruse to bring him to the point. And her incivility and extreme coldness since was perhaps to be put down to mortified vanity, and an idea that he had not treated her well. Really it all sounded very plausible to foolish, self-deluded George when he put it before himself. He reasoned it out in a very matter-of-fact, business-like way, on the hypothesis that she would re-

gard it in the same light. True, that Kate was a girl very much admired, and that men had got into the way of making a great fuss about her. But, after all, what were admirers? What good did they do to any woman? often a great deal of harm, fluttering around her. Men of straw almost all of them. In these days a sensible girl would think twice before she said "No" to a good solid offer of marriage. He was his father's eldest son, had no debts to speak of, and was not a particularly bad-looking fellow. Kate could not be so mad as to refuse him. And she had not anyone else that she cared about to stand in his light, at least that he had ever heard of. As for a ridiculous story of his sisters' about a photograph, that was evidently spun out of their own brains. Very likely it was a picture of Blount, or of her dead father; and she was ashamed of being caught indulging in such a manifestation of affection. Nothing likelier. People can get them-

selves to believe anything almost that they wish by such arguments, I think.

Such was the posture of affairs, and the posture of Lieutenant Chester's mind, when he came to visit his uncle and aunt at Daneham Court, and for several days afterwards. One afternoon everyone all over England, I should think—everyone, at all events, that was not either dying or in an office—was out of doors. Everybody at Daneham was certainly walking and driving and sauntering about, basking in the hot May sun; revelling in the sight of myriad leaves and flowers, bursting through their silken sheaths, the woods spread with their carpets of dim harebells.

“The heavens up-breaking through the earth,” as Tennyson (I think it is) says with a liberty, a freedom of fancy, which a lesser poet would not have ventured to indulge in.

The house stood blinking among its drowsy leaves, with all its doors and win-

dows open, so that man or beast might enter if they chose; with Venetian blinds lowered, through which, even though lowered, the smell of the flowers and the hum of bees came faintly into the cool empty rooms—not quite empty, either: in one of them a young lady was cultivating a taste for solitude—Margaret Chester. She had excused herself from going out, in a young lady's invariable plea—headache; and a headache she had, induced by fretting and disquiet of mind. She was not in spirits for the amount of repartee and merriment expected of her, and did not want anybody to notice her depression; and she stayed in-doors, and was now lying on a sofa in a rather dark recess between two windows, smelling vigorously at a vinaigrette, and bemoaning her fate, wishing she had never been born, and occasionally varying the wish by transferring it to Kate. Yes, now, how happy and prosperous she might have been if there had never been such a person



as Kate in existence, or if she had been strangled when first her baby-cries made themselves heard in this cold world! How different her lot might have been if it had not been shadowed by the unconscious influence of that odd little sorceress, her sister, who seemed to steal away both hearts that she wished to get possession of, and hearts whose possession rather annoyed her than otherwise, by some species of witchcraft!

But such reflections were utterly useless. There was Kate alive, and not to be put out of life except by killing, or causing her to be killed—for neither of which courses Margaret had the slightest inclination. As she lay there, idle, discontented, in a frame of mind as unlike as possible to that of the day and the season, the door opened, and the object of her aspirations—an object about as worthy sighing and striving after as those on which we usually waste the blood and sweat of our

hard struggles—George Chester walked in. He looked very hot, had his hat on, and a perfect swarm of trout-flies twining round it, and would evidently be rather obliged to anyone who would give him a job to do, suited to his capacity, for he was very short of such. First he rambled objectlessly to the table, took up a book lying thereon, opened it at haphazard, read half-a-dozen words, and tossed it down again. Then he sighed heavily, flung himself into an arm-chair, stayed there two seconds, uttered a brief soliloquy composed of these three words, "Confound the heat!" and then got up again.

All this time he had not perceived the presence of Margaret; he thought he had the room to himself. Sadly he walked to a looking-glass, gazed at himself steadfastly for some time, considered the sit of his tie, and readjusted the position of his pin, which was of the cheerful pattern of a death's head and cross-bones in ivory.

Margaret began to feel rather uncomfortable; he might not be pleased when he should discover that she had been there all along, spying upon his conceited little manœuvres, watching him make a fool of himself. So she made a slight movement to attract his attention; but he did not hear her, he was so busy dwelling, with a Narcissus-like fondness, on his own image in the mirror. First he looked at himself over his right shoulder, then over his left, with a lurking suspicion that there was something rather baggy about the cut of his coat at the back. He looked so exceedingly droll in this attitude, craning his neck to get a glimpse of his coat-tails, that Margaret burst into a roar of laughter, unrestrained, unrestrainable. At that unexpected sound, George's head came quickly back into its natural position; he started half out of his skin, and reddened with as guilty a flush as any schoolboy caught robbing an orchard.

"Hullo, what's the matter?" he exclaimed, turning sharp round, and then his eyes fell upon Margaret, half hidden in her dark nook. "O, it's you, is it?" said he, very much out of countenance. "I did not know you were there. I thought there was nobody in the room. I thought everybody was gone out. Why on earth did not you call out before?"

"I'm sure I wish to goodness I had been able to help calling out then," answered Margaret, between paroxysms of unfeeling merriment, forgetting her headache, and her heartache too, completely; "perhaps I might have had some more fun. O, George, you did seem so pleased with yourself! Now, on cool reflection, which point of view is best, do you think, tell me?"

These remarks were not calculated to lower George's colour.

"Don't badger a fellow," he said; "of course I was not admiring myself. I was

only thinking that this coat had the same fault that Capel's always have, that it bags at the back."

"You really are a very amusing young man—unintentionally, I mean. I wonder now, if I had not laughed, how long you would have stayed there figuring."

"Not two seconds. I should not have come in here at all if I had had anything better to do. I'm not such a carpet knight as you want to make me out."

"Why, I thought you were going to be away all day fishing. You told us at breakfast you were going to have such fine sport."

"So I thought I should, for it was nice and cloudy then—just the day for the May-fly—but no sooner had I got down to the mill-pond, and put my rod together, than the sun came blazing out, just as it is now, hang it! Of course it was all up with it then. They would not bite a bit, the beggars! Any fool could have told one that, with not a breath of wind to ruffle the

water, and the pool as smooth as a looking-glass."

"If it was like a looking-glass you might have performed those evolutions there; did you? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't tease, Maggie; you have run that joke off its legs. And what are you doing in here in this dark room, where one can hardly see one's hand before one for these blinds? Why are not you out with all the other girls?"

"I've got a bad headache; but, I say, George, it is a pity that you did not come in ten minutes earlier, for that friend of yours, Mr. Erle (is not his name?), was in here looking for you, wanting you to ride over with him to Canterbury."

"I met him as I came in; he asked me himself, but I got out of it."

"Why?"

"I don't think I'll tell you. You do not deserve to hear. You have not been good enough."

"O, do tell me! I'm very sorry I laughed. It was very rude of me. Dear George, I beg your pardon; I'll never do it again. Do tell me."

"Well, then, I thought I'd get you to come out on the lake with me for a bit. I wanted to have a talk with you; but, of course, as you have got a headache I would not think of asking you."

"Never mind the headache! It's gone. I should like nothing better. I'm sorrier than ever that I laughed. I'll go and get my hat this minute."

There certainly did not seem much trace of headache in the alacrity with which she jumped off the sofa; and leaving it and the neglected vinaigrette (now no longer needed), sprang upstairs to prepare herself; and in five minutes more they were walking over the greensward toward the boat-house.

"Will you take an oar?" George asked, as he handed his pretty companion in. "You made rather a better attempt last

time, and try as you may, you cannot upset this old tub."

"No—it's too hot. I will sit still and enjoy myself, and leave all the trouble to you. Take the boat under those trees over there—it looks so cool and quiet."

So they floated off, cleaving the shining waters. If those two people were not lovers they ought to have been—all the circumstances of time and place were conducive to such a condition. It was a very pleasant scene, as eye need light on : the big mere holding the sun far down in its deep, still breast; the garden, with all its fresh-blossoming flowers sloping down, with its scarlets and azures and goldens, to the water's edge, and the old branchy elms and beeches fringing it shadily; and—best gift of all—far up above the earth and its sorrows, heaven's chorister, the lark, pouring out, in the great cathedral of the sky, some of the unutterable joy that filled him, like a bodiless melody sent from some better



country to whisper of peace and gladness to tired human hearts. Out of the sun into the shade—right under the boughs of a wide-spreading horse-chestnut, covered with its pinky-white spikes, and gnarled roots straggling down barely into the pool at its feet; a gentle gust agitating the tall, scented grasses, stirring a bunch of harebells that were bending over the bank to get a peep at their own new-born beauty in the water beneath. George rested on his oars, and perspired a good deal.

“Will that do?” he asked.

“Excellently—could not be better. It was impossible to talk out there in that glare.”

“Quite—it frizzled up one’s ideas, did not it? Not that I ever had many.”

“Don’t run down yourself; it is a bad plan. You’ll find plenty of people to do it for you. But what was it you wanted to say to me?”

“Was there anything?”

"Yes—you told me you wanted to have a talk with me."

"O, ay; so I did—so I do; but it was not because I had anything particular to say. It was only that I thought we had not had a good talk for a long time."

"No more we have; we have been so busy chattering to other people. I suppose it is because we know we have such loads of opportunities of seeing and speaking to one another when we are at home."

"Yes, have not we? and we made pretty good use of them, too, last winter, over those afternoon tea-parties—did not we? How pleasant they were, to be sure!"

"Tea is always pleasant in an afternoon."

"What a low notion!—as if I was thinking of the Bohea itself. According to my ideas it was the talk and the jokes that we used to have that flavoured the tea."

"O, they were all very well, but I got rather tired of them."

"I did not, then. I hope we shall have them all over again when I come back next winter."

"That I'm sure you won't. One cannot bring things back like that when once they are over. All the spirit is gone out of them. They are like dishes warmed up the second day for dinner."

"I do not see it at all. We shall all be in the same relative position, I hope, as we were last winter; and the circumstances and conditions being the same, I do not see why the results should not be the same."

"Well, you'll see; but what is the good of arguing about such a trifle?"

"Ah, you say that because you are getting the worst of the argument."

"Very likely."

"You're angry now. I rather like getting you into a rage. It makes you look very pretty—not that I'd presume to say you were not always pretty. Girls

always are, of course; still it's an improvement."

"Don't be foolish—I hate compliments. Just pull the boat in two lengths farther, in amongst those water-lilies. I want to get some, and I cannot reach them from here."

George obeyed, and then asked, "Are you satisfied now?"

"Perfectly," and she leaned over the side, and dipping a bare hand in, pulled a number of the great heavy white flowers and their dark broad leaves. Dripping, they lay on the seat beside her, and she took up a green calyxed bud, closed still, and looked at it affectionately.

"Pretty things!" said George condescendingly. "How fond Kate used to be of them!"

"Used she?"

"Yes; do you not recollect last year, when my people gave that picnic sort of entertainment that you and she were at, how she had a lot of them in her hair in the evening?"

“Had she?”

“Yes—I wonder you do not remember. You are rather stupid to-day; you forget everything.”

“Now I come to think of it, I have some faint recollection of something about it.”

“How well they looked in among the thick plaits of her hair—such a quantity of hair as she has got, too — uncommon well!”

“Did you think so?”

“Yes—did not you?”

“No—I cannot say that I admired them much.”

“Poor little Kate!—I wish she was here now!”

Margaret was fond of her sister, but she could not echo that wish.

“Come, Maggie, don’t be cross; tell me something about Kate. I have not heard a word about her since I don’t know when.”

"I have not got anything to tell. She has not time to write to me or anyone else since she turned hospital-nurse."

"Has she done that? I never heard of it before."

"O yes—three weeks ago nearly. The fever-patients increased upon them so quick that they could not take them all in at the regular hospital; so they turned a private house into a temporary one, and Kate is a sort of matron, or head nurse in it. Of course there are plenty of under-nurses, but most of the onus falls upon Kate's and James's shoulders, I fancy."

"James!—what, she keeps to the wizened little parson still!"

"I should rather think so; why, they have been all in all to each other for the last month or two. I do believe they are the two best people in the world. I wish to goodness I was like them!"

"I say, Maggie, do you—do you think she'll marry him, after the fever is over?"

"I wish she could hear you—how indignant she would be !"

"It is not such a very unnatural supposition after all. One does not exactly see what other possible motive, but affection to him, she can have for the life she is leading now—nothing but schools and sick-visiting and district-meetings all day."

"I can understand her motive very well, because I happen to know it. I do not wonder that it is rather an enigma to you."

"She does not confide her secrets to me, certainly—I do not want her to; but I must say, to the uninitiated it does seem rather a throwing away of herself, wasting the best years of her life."

"She would tell you that she is not wasting them ; that she is, on the contrary, making the most of them ; that it is you and I, and such as us, that are wasting them."

"She is morbid ; it is unnatural to hear

a young girl preach like that; I wish you could get her out of this fancy."

"It would not be the smallest use if I were to try. I should not succeed; and most assuredly I shall not try. I begin to believe hers is the right view after all."

"For goodness' sake don't you turn Methodist too, Maggie! What on earth would become of me? You'd both be trying to convert me, and I could not stand two female parsons at me at once. I should have to emigrate."

Maggie smiled. "No fear of that," she said. "To admire goodness in other people, and not to like to hear it laughed or sneered at, is the highest pitch of excellence I shall ever attain to, and I am at that pitch now."

"Never mind, you're quite good enough for me. But about Kate now—don't you think that she will get tired of this mode of going on—of this new religious notion? don't you think that when the novelty is



worn off, she'll grow very weary of it, and come back to her old way? In fact, tell me candidly your own opinion—do you think it will last?"

Maggie was getting impatient of the subject. "How can I tell whether it will last or not? I know no more about it than you do yourself. Dear me! what a nuisance these midges are!"

"They do not bite me a bit; I suppose my skin is too thick for them to get through. Here, I know what will be the best plan; I'll cut you a little bough to drive them away with."

"Thank you."

He stood up in the boat and stretched an arm out to one of the leafy trees bending over them. Then, whilst cutting off a little twig, with his face averted, he began again at the old subject.

"But you must have an opinion one way or another; just say whether you think she'll always live the life she is doing

now: if so, she might just as well be a nun."

"Just as well; and so she will be in time, I daresay. I think she is quite capable of it."

"What?"

"I say that I think it is not at all improbable that she will turn nun some of these days. How you do tease about the girl!"

"Do I? Well, I won't make any more inquiries; only let me ask one thing. Don't you think that she will marry anyone?"

"Never; I'd stake all I have in the world (that is not much, to be sure) upon it."

"What a pity! she is so much too pretty and pleasant to be allowed to go to her grave an old maid."

"People cannot marry her against her will, I suppose—at least not in England."

"Who on earth said anything about

against her will? I meant *with* her will, of course."

"You did not make it very clear."

"But, Maggie, has she really never seen anybody to care about? I should not have given her credit for being such a stone. Has not she?"

"What's that to you? Cannot you be satisfied with knowing that she has not cared, does not care, and never will care two straws about you?"

George reddened, not with the heat this time. "There's your bough," he said, giving it into her hands, "and I must say for you, you are very rude and disagreeable; and I'm extremely sorry I asked you to come out. I never said that I wanted her to care for me."

Margaret relented. "I am disagreeable," she said, dispersing the midges with vigorous blows of her flail; "but I think that was hardly a fair question you asked."

"O, very well; if you think so, don't

answer it on any account. I withdraw it."

"Stay, I don't know what to say; you're not like a stranger, you are a relation of Kate's; I don't know why I should not tell you, only you must not breathe a word of it to your sisters."

"Trust me; do you take me for a born fool? Why, if I did, it would be half over England in less than an hour."

Maggie hesitated still; would it be a dishonourable betrayal of confidence? "I'm not sure that Kate would like it. I don't know that I'm doing right."

"Well, make up your mind one way or another. I won't urge you; though of course, now you have admitted that there is something, I can't help indulging in conjectures."

"You'd never get near the truth. Come, I'll risk it; swear you'll never reveal it to anybody."

"I swear."

“Well, then, she was desperately in love with someone once—is so still, I’m afraid.”

“Is so still? Lucky dog! Well, who is it? Anybody I know? Go on, quick.”

I do not know whether Miss Chester was justified in what she did; I hardly think so, but I only state a fact. There, in among the water-lilies, with the blue sky laughing overhead, and the blue water beneath, she narrated the whole story of her sister’s love and woes and wrongs, to an intent eager listener. At the end George ground his teeth.

“Villain! blackguard!” he remarked, boiling over with rage. “O, if I could but meet him in the street some day, I’d give him such an infernal licking as he never had before in all his days. I’d pommel the life out of him, the scoundrel! I say, Maggie, describe him to me exactly, that I may be sure to recognise him.”

Margaret was rather exasperated at

this excessive indignation ; what business was it of his ?

"I shall do no such thing ; you are not her brother ; it's no concern whatever of yours ; it would only make a disgraceful scene ; and moreover, as to licking him, as you call it, I can tell you what—he is an immensely strong big man, and that you'd most likely get the worst of it."

"Well, no matter, I should not care if I did : it would be in a good cause ; besides, I'm not quite such a chicken as you think ; at all events I know pretty well what to do with my fists."

"Don't be so absurdly bellicose ; it is like Bombastes Furioso. You'll make me repent of having told you ; and I only did it out of good-nature, to show you how utterly useless and hopeless your dangling after Kate still is."

George sighed heavily.

"I see it myself ; I'm very much obliged to you. It was very considerate and kind

of you; kinder than you think, perhaps, Maggie. I'll acknowledge to you now, that you have saved me the mortification of a refusal; for like an ass I had fully made up my mind to propose to Kate when I went home."

Margaret bent down her head over her flowers to hide its emotion; after a minute she looked up, and said rather anxiously, "And you will not now?"

"Of course not."

Then those two floated back over the bright mere, which did not look quite so bright to one of them as before; rather silent, both wrapped in their own thoughts, giving their tongues a holiday. As she left him at the house-door she turned and said softly, "You're not vexed with me, are you, George?"

"I should think not," he said warmly. "That would be unjust; you're the best girl I know."

He looked half inclined to stoop down.

and kiss the best girl he knew, but thought better of it, and only squeezed her hand. That evening Margaret came down to dinner with water-lilies in her hair; and George the philosophical began, for the first time, gravely to speculate whether after all gray eyes were not every bit as good as green, and rosy cheeks as pale ones.

“I’ve made a step to-day,” thought Maggie triumphantly, when she went to bed that night; and she slept well upon it.



## CHAPTER V.

A MAY morning, warm and serene, and brilliant as painter's eye could desire to see it. No barges floating down stream or being tugged up; no shopmen taking down shutters from their windows; no overworked milliners stitching at the ceaseless seam; no toil of any kind going on; for it is Sunday, and the church-bells are striving emulously which can send forth their sounds clearest, most ringing, on the pure air. The fever is abating in Queens-town; it has almost fulfilled its mission, filling many a grave, causing awful gaps and hiatuses by many a hearth—making vacant spaces that can never be filled up any more.

It is nine o'clock A.M., and Kate is standing at the door of the hospital, loitering a minute before she goes in. The fever-patients do not come in with such frightful overwhelming rapidity now; but still it is full, and there is plenty of work to do. Kate has been home to get a few hours' sleep, having been completely knocked up the night before, and compelled to succumb at last. She has arranged her hair fresh, with a neatness befitting the day, and has put on a clean cotton gown and white apron (her hospital-dress). As she goes through the garden she stops for a moment, like Evangeline, to gather a handful of flowers,—lilies-of-the-valley, honeysuckles, and blood-red carnations,—that the dying may enjoy earth's sweetest smells and sights for the last time. As she enters the room, she sees that one or two have died in the night. There they lie, with the rigid outline of their forms solemnly defined against the shrouding sheet, with

their dead faces covered up whitely. There they lie,

“Like drifts of snow by the wayside.”

She makes her way to the further end of the long chamber, to a bed on which lies the form of a stalwart, fair-haired young man, cut off in the pride of his manhood, and with a figure kneeling beside it. The kneeling figure is James, who, with his head in his hands, is absorbed in silent prayer. As she comes up with her pure pale face, hardly less pale, hardly less fair than the lilies she carries, he raises his head and looks up with a silent greeting. She glances towards the fair-haired young man and says “Dead?” interrogatively, but very calmly, for she and Death knew each other very well by this time. There is no shyness between them now.

“Quite; but I could not say exactly when. He went away so quietly; somewhere between the night and the morning,

without any of the struggle I feared; passed away without a sigh or a groan."

"Thank God! Poor fellow! I'm glad of that."

"Kate, that's the way, I hope, I shall pass away before long."

"Don't be cruel, Jemmy; it frightens me the way you have got to talk of late; but how ill and tired you look! No wonder, indeed. Now do go home, there's a dear fellow, and go to bed for an hour or two. You do not know how much good those few hours' sleep have done me. I'm quite a different woman. I feel as fresh as a lark."

"No, thank you, Kate; I'd rather not. I could not sleep if I did; and besides, there'll be plenty of time to sleep by and by."

"You shall not stay here any longer, that I'm determined on. What was the good of my coming, if not to relieve you? As you say to me, don't squander your

youth and health. You see I turn your own precepts against you."

"Well, I own I should like to go to church. It is Communion Sunday, too; and I own I should like to kneel at that altar, and taste that feast once again."

"Once again?"

"Yes, Kate; who knows but that next time I may be drinking the new wine in my Father's kingdom."

"Hush, hush! I won't have you talk like that. I'm sure you're quite faint with this long watching. Here, smell these flowers; they'll refresh you, I'm sure. The scent of these lilies would almost bring one back from the dead."

She held them towards him, and he inhaled their fragrance enjoyingly.

"Delicious!" he said, drawing a deep breath. "I wonder will there be flowers in heaven. It is a childish idea; but I cannot help thinking that those we have

here are but imperfect, fading copies of immortal types above."

"I daresay; I'm sure I hope so. But go away now," she said, almost pushing him out with a sister's gentle violence. "Go and take a walk before service; go down by the river. You have no conception how heavenly the breeze is there; it put new life into me, and will into you."

"Well, indeed, I almost think I may as well. I'm afraid I could not do much good if I stayed here. My head aches so splittingly that I can hardly see anything."

At those words a sensation of cold came over Kate, the shadow of a great dread falling upon her. Was there more grief yet coming up? Had not she had enough already? So James went, and Kate stayed; stayed all day in those hospital-wards, going through the routine of her usual duties; a routine which had become very familiar to her, and not irksome, by this time. Sometimes she fancied she was be-

coming unfit for the society of *well* people, she had grown so accustomed to spend all the hours of the day and night tending the sick. And the merry church-bells unwittingly rang one or two more to their homes; and the shadows lengthened, and the sun sloped westward, and the evening tide came. At that blessed season Kate was sitting by an open window, watching the sunset spreading redly over the fields of the sky. She had a hymn-book on her lap, and was saying softly over to herself these words:

"Nearer home, nearer home,—  
And nightly pitch my moving tent  
A day's march nearer home."

"Ah, that's what he does," she mused; "and he's getting very near home too, I'm afraid; afraid indeed! Yes, afraid for myself; but O, so very glad for him. Poor fellow! what a sad life he has had, to be sure; almost as sad as mine; well matched in that, I think; but when shall I get home too? O, if I could know that! Will it be

before twenty years, before ten, before five? O Lord, make no long tarrying." She turned her great soft eyes, brimming with tears, to the serene sky, and that hearty prayer went up like incense. Someone touched her, thus rapt, on the arm, to attract her attention. She turned and found that it was one of the assistant nurses, with a message to the effect that a person of the name of Mrs. Lewis wished to speak to her. Then she knew that what she dreaded had come upon her. For a second she stood with clasped hands, gathering her strength together, and then she walked calmly downstairs. Mrs. Lewis received her with a reverence both respectful and elaborate, and began deliberately,

"If you please, ma'am, I came to tell you about Mr. Stanley."

Though Kate knew it was come, she fought against it still.

"What about him? he has not got the fever? he's not ill? don't say he is."



"Yes, indeed, but he is though, poor gentleman, I'm sorry to say, and more than ill too; he was taken very sudden when he came in from church, and I sent directly for the doctor, and he came, and stayed the best part of an hour with him, giving him brandy and all manner of stimulants to keep him up; but when he came out he told me it was no use, that he could do him no good, and he hardly thought he'd outlive the night; so I thought I'd just come right off and tell you, as I knew you were such a friend of the poor gentleman's."

Kate's face assumed that dead-white, rigid look, which with her always indicated intensest pain kept under, and held in subjection.

"There, that'll do. I'll go to him;" and without giving Mrs. Lewis time to say another word (she had intended to say a good many more), she turned away, snatched up her bonnet, and ran hastily out, down the

street, not heeding the inquiring surprised glances of the good folks standing, enjoying the quiet Sunday evening, at their doors. What was it to her whether people would laugh or sneer at what she was doing? No such notion ever crossed her mind; the one thought that filled her whole soul, and left no room for any other, was that the man who had saved her from hell, who had been the best friend she had ever had in the world, was dying, and she must see him again to say good-bye.

At the door of Mrs. Lewis's lodgings a little knot of idle boys and men were gathered, and the sound of merry chat and loud laughter fell on the still summer air; but as Kate drew near, the voices fell; silently, civilly the men moved aside and made way for her to pass through. There was that in her face that awed even them. Through James's deserted sitting-room, with its bare, scant furniture; the papers littering over the table as usual; the signs

of recent occupation everywhere about ; everything the same, and yet so different. She caught her breath quick, as her eye fell on the old worn elbow-chair, that he would never sit in again. The door of the bed-room was ajar. Kate stood there a moment listening ; all was silent, and she pushed it gently and went in. A hired nurse was sitting behind the curtains, nodding, but at the slight noise caused by Kate's entrance, she woke up and came towards her.

"You may go," spoke Kate sternly (this stranger should not see her anguish—hear her voice tremble). "I'm come to nurse him ; do you hear ? Go."

After beginning an ineffectual remonstrance, the woman (only about three-quarters awake yet) obeyed ; and then Kate flew forward and threw herself on her knees by the side of the bed, in tearless agony. She would not weep ; let her cry her eyes out after he was gone, but she would not

harass his last moments with her selfish tears. Truly, to one looking down on that scene there would not have appeared much cause for weeping—rather for triumphant, awful mirth, that another brave soul, having fought the good fight, having kept the faith, was about to be crowned with his victor's wreath. Weep, indeed, for him who lay there—so quiet, so restful, with head thrown back on the pillow, and eyes closed—patiently, with calm expectancy, waiting for the end? There was no cruel struggle between life and death going on here; no battle between those rival powers. The outworks had been carried long ago—hardship and toil and sorrow had done that already. There was only the citadel to storm, and that gave in at the first summons.

Never again would he need the poor threadbare old clothes that he had shivered in through so many a winter day. Ere another morning should dawn he would be

clothed in the wedding-garment of the Lamb. The King's messenger, the long-expected, had come at last, and had given His message lovingly. His Father's servant was here, to take him home from the hard schooling of earth to the eternal holiday of heaven. He was willing and ready trustfully to put his hand in His, and launch with Him on the deep broad river that rolled between him and home. Not insensible, or wandering in delirium—as if in a sort of happy, waking trance—his probation over, his work done; already tasting beforehand the rest he was so near entering upon. Perhaps he was thinking softly about the dear gray-haired old father and the little blue-eyed sister he was going to meet again so soon—was picturing to himself how they would greet him, and rejoice at his coming. Perhaps he heard already the first notes of the great burst of music that would clash out harmoniously to welcome him; perhaps all minor joys were swallowed

up in the thought of the unspeakable bliss of beholding the dear Lord he had loved so, smiling upon him lovingly, and saying : "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

As Kate knelt there by the bedside, the heavy eyes unclosed, a smile stole over the wasted dying face—so evidently dying, but yet a death better than any life, and one thin pale hand travelled laboriously to Kate's and clasped it.

"I'm going," he said slowly. "You've come to see the last of me! Poor little Kitty!—you've been a very good little Kitty to me! God bless you for it!"

All very well to resolve not to cry. At these tender words her tears burst forth like rain.

"O Jemmy!" she wailed, "you are not going to leave me? You could not be so cruel! O, what shall I do? I shall be so desolate. O, do take me with you!—O, do, do!"

Her excessive grief seemed to disturb him—him who was past all grief. Feebly he stroked the bowed chestnut head.

“There, there,” he said with difficulty. “Don’t cry; there’s nothing to cry about. It makes me sorry to see you cry; and I am so glad. Poor child!—poor child!”

She shook back her hair from her wet eyes; bravely she forced back her tears.

“O, tell me, are you happy? Why do I ask, when I see your face! Jemmy, to-day you’ll be with Him in Paradise!”

The holy light came out clearer, stronger, on that dying man’s features; vanquished the death damps, the clayey pallor reigned there supreme.

“Yes, Kate; I hope so.”

“O, Jemmy, speak to me; say something to me that I may remember after you are gone—that I may keep hold of when I’m left all alone.”

James raised himself with difficulty in

the bed, and with hands growing disobedient, grasped about darkly (for that dimness that comes but once was obscuring his eyes) in search of something. Then he found what he sought—a little worn old Bible; and lifting it as if it were a great weight to him put it into her hands.

“Kate, take it. I’m going to the place it tells about. I don’t need it any longer. It is but a shabby little old book; but you won’t mind that. Will you have it?”

“Have it? O, Jemmy!”

If no thanks were conveyed in those broken choking words, James was never thanked for that present till she met him again.

“I’m a very poor man. I have not much to give you worth your taking; but I should like you to take that bit of poor little Mary’s hair that is in the drawer over there. I should not like strangers to be handling it. Will you take it, Kate?”

“Yes, James.”



At that he seemed content. He lay back, and his eyes sought her face, and dwelt there satisfiedly. Then they wandered away to the open window, through which the sun was to be seen going down, red as blood, behind the trees.

"Kate, I'm like him; I'm going down too; my sun is setting. I shall be gone before he is."

She covered his hand with kisses, and her tears fell hot upon it. She knew that he spake truth. The golden cord was loosed and the pitcher broken at the fountain, and only He who fashioned it could make it whole again. She saw the lamp of his life dying out for lack of oil, and she had no power to re-illumine it. In such moments is it that we feel our awful impotency, that we recognise ourselves as worms. Then the gentle voice, interrupted by slight pantings for the slow-coming breath, came to her ear again.

"It is a beautiful world, whatever they

say, and life is a grand mystery; but I'm glad it is over, Kate. I'm very tired."

"Poor fellow! you have had a hard battle; have not you?"

"Yes—rather, Kitty; but it's over now, and the rest is the sweeter."

He closed his eyes, exhausted with the slight exertion, and stillness reigned in that room, broken only by Kate's stifled sobs. James was sinking very fast; he seemed to be floating away into a kind of painless slumber. After a time Kate rose softly from her knees and leaned over him in an agony of fear lest he should be gone—lest she should never hear him speaking to her any more again. His lips stirred, and moved slightly; with her handkerchief she wiped the death-dews tenderly off the wide brow that grief and care had drawn so many lines on—lines now to be effaced for ever, and bent lower to listen. These words, murmured indistinctly, with pauses between each, she caught:

"For—ever—with—the Lord,  
Amen.—So let—it—be."

On her thus hanging tearfully over him the dim eyes unclosed once more; unselfish to the last, in the very jaws of death, he tried to smile upon her. With a last effort he put his arms about her neck, and whispered, in a voice nearly extinguished by the strength of the Great Victor, but loving and tender in its utter weakness still:

"Kate, it will not be quite heaven till you're there too. I shall stand and watch the door for you. You'll come, won't you?"

"Yes, dear; yes, if I can. O, God, help me!"

"Kate, it's getting very dark; are you here still? You have been more than a sister to me. Good-bye, darling! Kiss me this once."

"Good-bye, Jemmy! O, dear, dear old fellow!" and as she spoke she laid her pale lips on his for the first and last time.

Then the weary arms loosened their clasp languidly; a slight shiver passed over the toil-worn, patient body, and James fell back gently on his pillow—dead. Never hungry, nor lonely, nor sick, nor sorry again—at rest, for ever, in the bosom of God.

## CHAPTER VI.

Not a day, not an hour, not a minute can anyone pass over of their real lives without living through, tasting its good and its evil; but of the fictitious life of a book one may overleap centuries if one chooses; that is to say, if one is not shackled by a Frenchman's slavish subjection to the unities. I will avail myself but moderately of this privilege—a privilege I might use so largely—and will content myself with skipping a month. It is June then, the trees have put on a fuller deeper green, the birds are growing less vocal than they were a few weeks ago, and the fever is over and gone—one of the things of the past; but still people know that it has been, by the long rows of new graves in the cemetery outside

the town, by the preponderance of black over all other hues in the dress of people in the streets. There was a new face to be seen in the pulpit of Queenstown church every Sunday now—a new voice exhorting to repentance, and faith, and charity; a fresh lodger in Mrs. Lewis's apartments; the new curate, in fact, who, having bought James's furniture at a valuation, was sitting in the old leathern elbow-chair, and thinking seriously that he must get the shabby old thing new-covered. It is somewhere about five o'clock, P.M., and Kate Chester is sitting alone in the drawing-room at No. 1 Cadogan-place, in a plain black dress with a bunch of white roses in the front. A white rose herself, and a very fair one. The look of hardness and austerity is gone out of her face; it could not find a permanent home in those soft features; it had never come back since the day when it had been washed away with scalding tears by the bedside of dying James Stanley. Very

grave and serious she looked indeed, the causeless gaiety and light-heartedness of youth and animal spirits were banished, never to return; but there was no hopeless sadness as there used to be. At last she had learned experimentally that the time is short, that before long it will be that "those that weep shall be as though they wept not." After toiling like a galley-slave for so long, she thinks she is entitled to a little rest; so she sits there luxuriously, on a low chair by the open window, smelling her roses and reading Shakespeare. She does not get on very fast with her play, for every minute her eyes are lifted up from her book to glance down the road; she is expecting her sister home this afternoon, and is looking out anxiously for the first sign of her approach. At last her listening is rewarded. Off in the distance is heard the rumble of a carriage, five minutes more and it turns in at the white gate. A peal on the knocker, voices in the hall—not only

women's trebles but a man's sonorous bass (not the cabby's either). Steps on the stairs—two steps, a woman's light one and also a man's heavy one. Kate is quite alone, but at these sounds she smiles to herself. Then the door bursts open and Maggie rushes in, blooming as any damask rose, all blushes and smiles and pink ribbons. A fire of kisses ensues.

"Well, Kitty, how are you? it seems quite funny seeing you again."

Kate returns the kisses with interest. She has so few to love now that she clings the more to those that are left.

"I thought you were never coming," she said, and her green eyes shone with a quiet gladness. "I am so glad to have you back again."

"Kate, here's George; he has taken the trouble to escort me all this long way up; is not it good of him?"

At this introductory remark, the said young man, who had been hitherto stand-



ing by as a spectator, grinning pleasedly, came forward and greeted his cousin.

"O," cried Kate, with amusement in her tone. "I begin to see.—How are you, George?"

"I suppose you guess, don't you?" Maggie asked, with a rather embarrassed laugh.

"Of course she does," said George, putting a hand on each of Maggie's shoulders, as if to proclaim himself owner thereof. Kate smiled softly upon them both.

"Perhaps I do a little."

"I suppose you found it all out from my letter this morning, did not you?"

"No, I cannot say that I positively found anything out; I had my suspicions. I'm not surprised, but I'm very, very pleased."

"That's all right; I was sure you would be—was not I, George?"

"I congratulate you both most heartily. People always say that, as a matter of

course, I know; but I do mean it really. You believe me, don't you?" and she put out a hand frankly to each; both to the sister who had been jealous of her, and to the man who would fain have married her.

"Yes," they both said, as unanimously as if it had been a response written down for them.

"I shall have two brothers instead of one now; but come, are not you very tired, and hot, and dusty after all that railway? You'll have some tea, won't you? I told them to bring some in."

Then George spoke up. With great discernment and amiability of feeling he perceived that at this conjuncture his room would be better than his company. Those two sisters had a great deal to say to one another, which, though it was all about him, and because it was all about him, could not be said before him, so he said:

"Not for me, thank you, Kate. I must

be going down to our place to look up the old people. Good-bye."

As soon as he was fairly gone, Kate kissed her sister again, and looked her full in the face.

"Well, who was right—you or I?" she asked.

"O, you; but I did not think you would have been."

"You see it has all come right, as I said it would."

"Yes, so it has; but I thought it then too good luck to be true."

"Well, I won't ask how it all came right, for I suppose that would not be a fair question; but I may ask how long it has been settled?"

"Only the day before yesterday."

"The same day that you wrote to me?"

"Yes, the morning of that day."

"Well, I suppose you are in a state of the most complete beatitude now—a sort of seventh heaven?"

"O, yes, now I am, but I can tell you I was anything but that three days ago. I began to think it was never coming—began to be afraid that he was hankering after you still."

"After me? Absurd! You should not get such notions into your stupid old head."

"Ah, but I did though. I could not help; it was no great wonder, considering what he had told me. But then that morning he asked me to come out walking with him, and it was all smooth after that; but I can tell you I was pretty miserable before."

"I suppose he is going to tell his father and mother now?"

"Yes. O, there'll be no difficulty there. Louisa told me they had all been longing for him to marry one of us ever since we came. He has been very unsettled of late, and they think that getting a wife will be the best thing that can happen to him."

"I think so too. Dear me, how odd it all seems!"

"Yes, does not it? But, come, let's have a look at you. Well, really, you do look uncommonly well, considering."

"I never was better in my life."

"I am so glad to see you again alive, after all this dreadful fever. At one time I hardly thought I should."

"It did seem doubtful."

"I wonder how you ever managed to live through it."

"I wonder so myself sometimes. I don't think I could go through it again if it were to come back directly, without giving me a little breathing-time."

"Heaven forbid! I should take to my heels pretty quick again if it did."

"O, no fear of that; it has done its work."

She shuddered a little, and sighed as she thought of what had been a part of that work.

"And so *he's* gone, Kate, too?"

"Yes, he's gone."

"Poor fellow! I *am* so sorry. I don't know when I've been so shocked as when I opened your letter that morning. It was so very sudden, too."

"Yes."

"And you were with him at the last?"

"Yes. Maggie, please, we won't talk about that any more; I cannot manage it quite yet."

"Poor thing! I'm sorry; it was stupid of me. I see that we must try and cheer you up a bit."

"I don't think I need cheering, Maggie; I feel very cheerful."

"You must come and live with us when we are married."

How pleasant that "we" and "us" are to young people before their novelty is worn off!

"Must I? There'll be plenty of time to talk of that by and by."

"Which means that you intend to shirk us. Ah, I know you so well."

"It means that I think young married people are much better left to themselves, without the encumbrance of a permanently spinster sister attached to their establishment."

"I don't see it at all. It would be the pleasantest arrangement possible; and I'm sure George would say the same if he were here."

"George is very good-natured, and would say anything to please you just at present; but have you settled where you are to live?"

"O no; it is early days to talk about that; but wherever it is, there'll be always room for you. I wish you would make up your mind to that."

"Thank you, Maggie; I have made up my mind; but I'll tell you all about that by and by."

## CHAPTER VII.

IN these days it did seem that Kate's words concerning herself were coming true. She was becoming isolated, as she had prophesied of herself long before. The ties that bound her to the world seemed to be snapping off one by one; there were very few left now. Well, perhaps it is better that they should break before life breaks too. The thread of life by itself is a slight one, broken off without difficulty or pain; it is the strong cords of love and interest that make the fracture so complicated, so agonising in the execution. Maggie, the sister with whom she had waked and slept, had quarrelled and made up again, and been one in interest with for so many



years, going to be married, and enter into another sphere altogether; Blount away soldiering eleven months out of the twelve, and thinking more of his new red coat than of her; James dead, and Dare lost to her for ever;—what more had she to live for? Whom would her dying grieve much? Whom did her life profit much? she sometimes asked herself. With nobody was she first or even second. Yes, still she was first, and always would be, with poor wicked Dare. Though she prayed to God nightly, often with burning tears, that she might never see his face again in this world, she could not help being glad of that. How things were changed since four short years ago she had been the gayest of high-spirited young girls, the pet and darling of a happy home, whom the breath of care and trouble was not allowed to come near! Now she was a woman, and a very lonely woman, who had gone through a furnace of affliction, and did not seem to

have much to hope or to fear in the world any longer now. Before her she saw spreading the path of her future life. Down a barren slope it led; no flowers grew by the wayside, no green grass upsprang thereon; and at the bottom of that drear slope sat "the shadow feared of man." To reach him, to be taken into the folds of his mantle of night, was all she had to look forward to now. After her return home, Maggie Chester's time was very fully occupied buying wedding-clothes, receiving wedding-presents, attending to the exigencies of a sufficiently importunate lover, and lastly, making preparations for a ball to be given on the eve of her wedding at a hotel in the town, on account of the smallness of their own house. Consequently all thought about her sister's future was crowded out of her head. If any idea concerning her ever crossed her busy happy brain, she dismissed it lightly, saying to herself, "O, of course she'll get over her scruples; of

course she'll come and live with us; what else is there for her to do?"

One afternoon, about a week before the day fixed for the marriage, Maggie and Kate were both together in the store-room, on their knees, surrounded by a sea of cotton-wool, hay, and silver-paper, packing up a quantity of glass and china which appertained to Mrs. George Chester elect. For some time they were too busy to say much; but as the white sea of cotton-wool diminished, and they began to foresee an end to their labours, Margaret lifted up her head, pushed off the straggling hair from her flushed face, and said:

"By the bye, Kate, let me ask you before I forget it again,—I was thinking of it only this morning,—what are you going to do with yourself whilst we are off on our wedding-tour? Of course, when we come back and set up housekeeping, you'll join us directly; but what do you intend doing till then?"

No answer. Kate buries her head in a deep box; only some red-brown plaits are seen emerging.

"Kate, do you hear? Why don't you answer? I want to know what you'll do with yourself while George and I are off honeymooning? Will you stay here, all by yourself, or will you go to the Chesters? They want very much to have you."

"Well, I don't think I shall do either."

"Not do either! Then what will you do? Perhaps you intend to come and chaperone us."

"No, I don't; but I shall leave Queens-town the day after the wedding."

"Where are you going to?"

"To Manchester."

"Where?"

"To Manchester."

"And who on earth do you know there? It must be some new acquaintance that you have made while I have been away."

"I don't know anybody there yet."

"Kate, you are very enigmatic to-day. What do you mean? I wish you would be a little more explicit."

"Well, the truth is I am in no hurry to tell you, because I am going to do a thing that I know you'll look upon as utterly absurd and quixotic and young-ladyish."

"Well, out with it. I must know, of course, whether you tell me or not. How slow you are!"

"I have decided to turn Sister of Mercy."

"Nonsense!"

"I was afraid you would take it in that way."

"Turn Sister of Mercy—*nun*!"

"Not nun, certainly. I'm not going to turn Roman Catholic, don't think that. I don't feel inclined to change my faith for the sake of wearing a rosary. It is a Protestant Sister of Mercy I'm going to be."

"Is that the plan you darkly hinted at some time ago? No wonder you did not dare to explain it fully. I would have worked heaven and earth to stop it."

"Yes; that's the plan."

"And why, in the name of goodness, if you must do such an insane thing, did you fix upon Manchester of all places in the world—such a horrible smoky hole, and such an immense way off?"

"Well, I'll tell you how it came about. I got upon this subject one day with Miss Nugent, and she told me about this establishment, and that she had a sister who belonged to it, and that it is about the best conducted and managed altogether in England, and does an infinity of good; and she also told me that through her sister she could get any information about it for me, and, indeed, get me to be made a member if I chose, without any difficulty; so I thought such a good opportunity was not to be lost, do you see?"

"I see in the sense of understanding; but in the sense of approving I do not see by any means."

"I'm sorry for that; but it cannot be helped."

"May I ask how long this has been settled?"

"Not much more than a week, finally. I have had an idea of this kind of thing for months past—ever since I saw prophetically that you and George would make a match of it; but up to the time of James's death I always pictured to myself going to one of those places in London, or somewhere near here; but now that he has gone away and left me, it does not matter how far I go—the farther the better. Indeed, I would much sooner be at a great distance from you and everybody I know; for you would only be tempting me away from my work out of kindness and good-nature."

"And you coolly adopted this plan, and made all these arrangements, without

asking anyone's advice, without consulting any human being under the sun,—a young inexperienced thing like you."

"Inexperienced do you call me? I think I have gone through as much in the last three years as many people do in eighty; but the reason why I told nobody about this was that I knew they would only 'pooh-pooh' it—think it a silly whim, born of an idea that 'Sister of Mercy' sounds nice and interesting and romantic; and I knew, too, that I was old enough to judge for myself, and knew my own soul much better than anyone else could possibly do. I don't think it was any conceit or obstinacy that made me do it. O Maggie, you'll get reconciled to the notion in time, I assure you."

"I'm sure I shall not, if you'll excuse me for saying so. I think that with your face and figure and gifts generally it is the act of an idiot. O Kitty, Kitty, do think better of it. Give it up."



Kate shook her head. "No, Maggie, I cannot indeed. I have been so unsettled and tossed about in mind for ever so long, that I look forward to this sort of life, in which one learns to forget self, and act as if self were not, as a kind of haven of rest."

"You are too young to talk in that strain. All very well for a battered old woman of sixty to talk of longing for a haven. Why, Kate, if you come and live quietly with George and me, you can be as independent as possible, and as much your own mistress as you chose; you will be able to do every bit as much good, without making such an utter sacrifice of yourself and all your prospects."

"No, I could not; one can do six times as much working in concert as alone. If I lived with you, I should have a thousand pleasant little distractions; besides, how often you have told me that I am too young to visit all these low parts of Queenstown, and that I was very much

talked about and blamed for doing it. Now, with the protection of the name and dress I shall have, I may go anywhere unmolested; that is an undisputed fact."

"I should have thought you would have had enough of that sort of thing the last month or two."

"No, I have not, Maggie. I have tried pleasing myself, and hoping for things in this world, for one-and-twenty years, and every hope I had in the world is shipwrecked; you know that; I don't often talk about it, but that does not make me feel it less. Now it is my only wish to do some little good before I die, to grow a little like poor dearest Jemmy. O, Maggie, I do miss him so—and then, perhaps, God will let me die like he did."

"Die, die, die! don't be always harping upon dying! it is not lively talk for a person who is on the verge of matrimony."

"I'm rather a kill-joy, I think. I used not to be, used I?"

"No indeed, you were not, and you shall not be for long either; old Piggy and Blount are coming here to-morrow, you know; well, as soon as ever they arrive, I shall set them both upon you; you shall have no peace till you promise to abandon this plan altogether. There!"

"Old Piggy as much as ever you like; but please do not set Blount upon me. I could not bear him to be deriding me, and thinking me a fool."

"I want him to think you a fool; I want him to make you think yourself one."

"Ah, even he could not do that; I am so persuaded, far down in the bottom of my heart, that I am in the right; but I don't intend to tell him anything about it while I am here, not until I am at Manchester, and fairly settled at my new work, and it's all done and irrevocable; then, and not sooner, I shall write and break the news to him."

"He will be in a great rage, I expect."

"Very likely."

"I should not be surprised if he were to get two doctors to prove you of unsound mind (it is very easily done nowadays), and put you into a madhouse."

"Hardly, I think; but, Maggie, you will not say anything to him about it, will you? I know exactly in what light it would appear to a young fellow just entering life, with everything before him, a young fellow who could have no more conception of how tired of everything I feel, how stranded and finished off altogether, as concerns this world, than I have of the sensations of that cow out there. You'll oblige me very much if you'll grant me this little thing; promise me this, Maggie; promise me."

"O, I'll promise anything you like, though I don't see the object of it; promises are like pie-crusts, you know, made to be broken."

"No, it must not be that kind of pro-

mise. Ah, Maggie, don't bully me this last week."

"Kate, I always hated those sisterhoods; they have been a curse to numberless families, I am certain; a number of women huddled together, cut off from their lives, and their friends, and all their prospects in life. Why cannot women keep to their right functions of marrying and being happy?"

"Be happy if they can, by all means; people's ideas about happiness differ, you know. We had better not get upon a definition of happiness; and marry also, by all means, if they can have your luck, and get the man they are in love with, otherwise marriage would be a punishment hardly inferior to being tied to a dead body."

"Well, I remember once reading in some book that a bad husband was better than no husband at all; and, though I was ashamed to give out that sentiment myself,

yet I always agreed with it cordially. Hush! yes, it *is* him—there's George outside, I hear his voice."

Out of her head went all thoughts of Sisters of Mercy, and their abominable practices; away went all recollections of Kate's existence. Up she sprang, and ran out into the passage to meet her lover. The door was left ajar, and Kate could hear the sound of murmured words and kisses.

Her hands lay idle on her lap, and her eyes turned to a patch of blue sky seen through the window. "How happy they are!" she said to herself. "Ah, so was I once, but that is over and gone. O, that day among the flowers with you, my poor, wicked old fellow! Well,

'I have lived and loved, but that was to-day;  
Make ready my grave-clothes to-morrow.'

## CHAPTER VIII.

KATE was rather superstitious—excitable women, warm-blooded, imaginative, mostly are. Let it not be supposed that this remark is a prelude to some dismal tale of how Kate saw the ghost of her dead father, or her mother, or an uncle, or an aunt, or of any individual whom she had never beheld before. No such thing. Kate Chester was never visited by any apparition during the whole course of her short life, and in this I consider her rather exceptionally fortunate. But that night she had a dream. This in itself was rather an event to her; very seldom did she dream; mostly she lay lapped in the deep untroubled slumbers of youth and health. But this night she dreamt that she was standing before the

altar of the old village church where her father lay buried, with Dare, being married to him. Oddly enough, the altar was draped with black. The parson was reading out of a big book to them, and this parson was James Stanley ; at least he had his face, but the voice was the droning voice of the new curate of Queenstown. And she herself was robed in bridal white, and had a chaplet of flowers about her brow ; but somehow the flowers did not seem like roses and myrtles—they were more like rosemary. And it was not the marriage service the parson was reading ; distinctly she heard these words, “ Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” Then the ceremony appeared to be ended, and she and Dare stood there with their hands clasped in each other ; and she, with a throb of intensest ecstasy, looked up in his face and said, “ There, Dare, it has all come right as I said.” The dream was so vivid that at first she doubted whether that



were vision and this reality, or that reality and this vision ; then full recollection came back, and boding fears crowded thickly about her. "Dreams go by opposites," she said to herself. "If you dream of a marriage, it foretells a death that never fails. I remember Maggie dreamed of a marriage just a week before mamma died. O, nonsense! How weak I am! Of course it is that I have been thinking so much of Maggie's wedding, that it has put such ideas into my head." But still that dream made her thoughtful all through the day. In the afternoon Blount Chester arrived ; in the evening, Mr. and Mrs. Piggott. The whole former Pen Dyllas party were assembled now. Blount, I have said, arrived in the afternoon. Leisurely he strolled into the drawing-room, and nodded to his sisters. To show emotion of any kind or degree was not permissible to a Greek philosopher or a Red Indian—is not permissible to an Englishman. He stooped his comely young

head, and submitted patiently, while they flung glad arms about his neck, and gave him a hearty kiss. Then he calmly repaired the damage their impetuosity had done to his toilette.

"There, girls ; that'll do. Baking hot it is, and you are not making me cooler."

"I suppose you walked up from the station?"

"Yes, of course I did. Did you expect me to drive up in a fly? Has not old Fleecy come yet?"

So he designated his reverend uncle.

"No ; we don't expect them till the evening."

"Of course he'll come by cattle-train, in a pen with a lot of other baa-lambs."

Maggie laid a beseeching hand on his shoulder.

"Blount, I entreat you, don't make fun of him after he comes when I am in the room ; it will infallibly set me off laughing, and then there'll be no stopping me."

"I have no intention of making fun of the wretched old beggar. I wonder does his addled old pate ache as much as it used to do."

"It's to be hoped not, for aunt Harriet's sake. If I had been her, I should have been tempted to make it ache still worse, or stop aching altogether, many years ago."

"Good hearing for George, Maggie; that's the way you'll be serving him some day."

"By the bye, Blount, do you think he'll kiss George? You know he'll be his nephew now."

"Hardly, if he is wise. George's bristles would draw blood."

Maggie looked rather foolish; she began to look upon those bristles as her own particular property, and to resent insults to them as such.

Life is full of disappointments. Very seldom the good things on which we count,

to which we look forward, come to pass ; generally they elude our grasp. But that evening, by the train, and at the time expected of him, Daddy Piggott made his appearance, and also that attendant spirit, Mammy Piggott — only, somehow, one never thought of her existence, she was so swallowed up and merged in her lord's brightness. Down ran a brace of dutiful nieces to greet him as his big meek black body emerged slowly on the white stone steps.

“ Well, Maggie, my love ; well, Kate, my love, I hope you are pretty well.”

How is it possible, with what single letters, or combination of letters, to write down a kiss ?—for at this period each of the girls performed a chirping little salute on the fair large surface of their uncle's extended cheek, flabby as of yore.

“ Yes, thank you, dear loves ; I'm pretty well, only that this dreadful railway always shakes me so terribly. But I really am

better than I thought I should be—ain't I, my love?"

"Will not you come in and sit down, Mr. Piggott? and aunt Harriet or one of us can settle with the cabman."

"Well, indeed, my dear loves, I think that perhaps I had better.—By the bye, dear Ma, will you be so very kind as to see that they take my medicine-chest up into my room? I think I had better take my draught as usual before dinner—had not I, dear love?"

"Yes, love."

"I don't want to give you any trouble, dear Ma, but I think perhaps it would be wiser not to let the servants carry it upstairs, as they might let it fall and break it; and you know, dear love, that would never do."

"Very well, love; I'll take it up myself."

"And now, my dear girls, I think I'm quite ready.—Kate, my little maid, I'm

afraid I must trouble you to give me an arm, for, after all, I'm afraid I'm a little giddy—a little slower, please, dear love."

"Would you like to go to bed, Mr. Piggott?"

"No, thank you, my love. I shall be all right presently, I hope. I think, dear Ma, that I had better, perhaps, go straight to my room and take a little nap before dinner, and then I trust I shall be pretty well all the evening."

By these fragments of conversation it may be seen that Mr. Piggott was unchanged; exactly the same as when at Pen Dyllas he had baaed and bleated to ears that did not hear him, they were so full of the echo of another's deep tones.

Next night, as the two Chesters were going to bed, Maggie stopped suddenly, with brush suspended in mid air.

"Kate," she said, "I heard you stammering and stuttering this evening, when old Piggy asked you something about the

ball; you don't mean to say that you are intending not to go to it?"

"Well, I was rather thinking of staying away," Kate owns from under a torrent of warm curls.

"What absurdity! of course you must go. I shall take it as an insult to myself if you don't. Who ever heard of the bride's sister not being present on such an occasion?"

"But, Maggie, I have no dress."

"What does that matter? Leave all that to me, and I'll turn you out better dressed than ever you were in your life before."

"But I could not go in black to this ball, and I should not like to go in colours."

"Kate, that is overstrained, false sentiment."

"No, it is not. I don't want to put off the outward signs of mourning for poor James, even though I know that I shall

carry the inward mourning with me to my grave."

"Kate, I am going to say a disagreeable thing, but I must. The way you are going on people will be sure to say that you were in love with James Stanley; that you are making a great fool of yourself about him, and perhaps—it is not at all improbable—it may come round to Colonel Stamer's ears—you would not like that, would you?"

The torrent of hair droops lower and lower—not an inch of face to be seen.

"Maggie, don't be cruel," says a stifled voice; but she winces and succumbs.



## CHAPTER IX.

It is the night of the ball—a ball that so many a little heart has been beating expectantly for through the last lagging fortnight; that many a little seventeen-year-old has been counting the days to.

“There was a sound of revelry by night.”

The noise of carriages rolling along the streets of Queenstown is continuous—almost ceaseless; a long row standing before the door of a large hotel, whose hospitable portals stand open in the summer night, welcoming all comers. Every minute some vehicle, having discharged its load of tulle and tarletane, is being driven away, and its occupants swell the crowd within. And within there was a pleasant sight to be seen, whatever anyone, with jaundiced eyes and a misanthropic turn of mind, might say to

the contrary. A big room, festooned and decorated—wreaths of laurel and ivy, with roses and asters laughing out between, lit up with branching chandeliers, almost into the brightness of day. Nothing but flowers and music, pretty faces and low voices—the bright side of the picture of life. Nothing to remind one that there is a dark side. Chaperones and matrons reposing on the benches, scarlet-cloth-covered in all the dignity of feathers and brocades; each one apparently absorbed in hearing and retailing gossip, but in reality keeping a keen eye on her own particular lamb among the gauzy flock, watching unconsciously to see if there seemed any chance of business being brisk this evening; or whether, on the other hand, the said lamb were laying up for herself any matter for rebuke when they should have returned home, and have laid aside the brocade and the remnants of gauzy rags. A knot of men—officers, principally importations from Windsor and

Hampton Court, lounged about the doors, knowing nobody as yet; amusing themselves criticising the girls as they passed, and perfectly conscious of being in return the object of a good deal of interested notice.

“The harp, violin, bassoon,” were clashing out loud and clear, and nobody could hear their own voices hardly. If people wanted to make love they must not whisper it, according to approved ideas, but roar it. Round and round went the mad whirl of men and girls—faster and madder it grew, every minute as the music surged and swelled out, and then sank, and died away in luxurious cadences. Men clasping vigorously slender waists; little maidens leaning confiding heads almost down on their lovers’ shoulders—soft cheeks swept by manly whiskers; as they floated and swam round in utter enjoyment. Maggie stood at the door as hostess, receiving everybody; longing for the end of the arrivals, that she, too, might go and join the dance, with feet

that seemed barely able to help keeping time to the music. Every now and then she looked piteously at George, who stood dutifully near her, as the entrance of some new party again deferred the period of her felicity. And where was Kate meanwhile? Not being hostess, nor having any duties on her white shoulders, she might be dancing all the breath out of her body if she chose. But such is the contrariety of human nature, what people can do, without anyone attempting to prevent them, they often do not care to do. Kate was not dancing at all; she was sitting alone at an open window, leaning one white elbow on the sill, and the roses and jasmines were straggling in to greet her; telling her, with their cool, sweet odours, how pleasant and still the July night was outside. At her entrance into this house to-night she had been assailed by a variety of exclamations and ejaculations from all her female acquaintances.

"You here, Kate! Well, wonders will never cease. Why, I thought you had turned so religious that you thought dancing one of the seven deadly sins. Never mind what they say, Kate, I'm very glad to see you back among us. You are a very wise girl, I think."

Kate did not think it worth while to explain—they would all know soon enough. As she moved up the room on Blount's arm, not being deaf, she could not be unconscious of the murmurs that buzzed around her.

"What a lovely girl! Who on earth is she? What a figure! I say, just look at Kate Chester! How brilliant she looks! She is six times prettier than ever!"

Hitherto Blount Chester had not admired Kate much more than it is the wont of brothers to admire their sisters; now, however, he did feel proud of being seen with her, of having her in his charge.

"I say, Kitty, I flatter myself we are

creating quite a sensation," he said, looking down on her, and his jolly, good-looking young face dilated into a gratified grin.

Kate laughed too. She did not pretend not to have heard these commendations of her.

"I think we are," she answered; and though she was going to turn Sister of Mercy to-morrow—to wear an unbecoming poke bonnet and a black serge dress for evermore, yet her heart beat and swelled a little under the influence of that pleasant incense.

Blount was besieged with requests for introductions, but Kate was obstinate—would not dance, did not dance; only intended to look on. Blount lost his temper at last, told her she was a fool for her pains; that anyhow he would not be bothered with her any longer; shook off her hand from his sleeve, and left her sitting by herself, to amuse herself as best she might. There were many women at the ball that night

with far more regular features than Kate's, with noses that had no tendency to the forbidden upward curve, that went down, as noses should—not up, as hers did; with cheeks twice as rosy, figures twice as tall and imposing;—but for all that, singular to relate, there was hardly a dissentient voice among the men, when someone suggested that the little thing in green, with the lot of bright hair, was the belle of the night. The women, indeed, tried to set up a rival beauty, but they had her all to themselves. Many an eye-glass, and many an eye without a glass, was continually turning to the corner where Kate sat, an obstinate little wallflower. If this refusal to dance had been a design of the most deep-laid coquetry, it could not have tantalised her admirers more.

At last Maggie's duties were ended, and she had leisure to think of something else beside bowing and saying:

“How do you do? So glad to see you!”

After looking round for her sister, and discovering the posture of affairs, she turned to George and said, in rather a vexed tone:

"Just look at Kate! What a goose she looks huddled up in that corner over there, as if she were performing some penance! Just go over to her and tell her from me that it's all nonsense—she *must* dance; she is making herself so remarkable sitting there, with everybody staring at her: people will be sure to put it down to conceit. Go, there's a good fellow."

"I don't expect she'll mind me much."

"O, yes, she must, and—stay, take somebody with you to introduce to her, that she may have no excuse."

"Who shall I take?"

"Let me see—I'm sure there's plenty of choice. O, one of those men that are standing over there—those officers, they don't know a soul. I'm sure it would be a charity to get them partners."

"I know who I'll get—Tankerville. I



did not see him before; he's in the 3d Buffs; such a good fellow, and a capital dancer."

Off he went, and attacked the unconscious Tankerville.

"I say, old fellow, do you want a partner? I can get you one if you do."

"O, I don't know; I don't seem to care much about it," responded Captain Tankerville languidly.

Perhaps it occurred to him that the 3d did not dance.

"Nonsense! don't be lazy."

"Well, to oblige you, then; only I'll have a look at her first. Mind, I won't have anything to say to her if she is ugly, or if she squints."

"She is the prettiest girl in the room, and it is very doubtful if she'll have anything to say to you."

Kate was getting rather tired of talking to nobody, so perhaps she was glad when she perceived George skirting the dancers

to come to her, with a large young man with a blonde moustache and no whiskers following in his wake. George stooped down to whisper to her :

“ Kate, Maggie has sent me to you to tell you that you must dance ; that you are making yourself so remarkable, sitting here with everybody staring at you ; and I have brought a friend of mine who is dying to be introduced to you.”

“ But, George, I have refused so many, I could not possibly dance now.”

She lifted up her little piquant face, and her great pensive eyes to his, and Captain Tankerville peeped at her over George’s shoulder, and an evil intention he had been nourishing of bestowing a quadrille upon her vanished like morning dew.

“ Fiddle-de-dee !” said George. “ You must say you made a mistake.—Here, Tankerville.—Kate, will you allow me to introduce Captain Tankerville to you?—My cousin, Miss Chester.”

Ten minutes after, Kate, the non-dancing recluse, was flying round in the arms of a large young man whom she had never beheld before. He was a capital dancer, as George had said, and, for the matter of that, so was Kate. Light as a feather, and as springy as—a fit comparison fails me—those round, soft white women often are. Ten minutes of spinning round, swiftly and smoothly, with complete agreement in their supple movements; then they stop to take breath. Kate pants a little, and fans herself. Captain Tankerville pulls out his pocket-handkerchief, wipes his forehead and says, "Thank you; that is a treat." It is exciting, certainly, Kate says to herself. She does not repent of her determination, but she feels the seduction of the hour. Formerly she had been passionately fond of dancing; was always of a nature singularly susceptible to outward influences; to anything that spoke to the senses. Her love for dancing seemed to have come back; her

blood went through her veins with a quicker rush; everything around had a temporary spell for her — the hot atmosphere, scent-laden, the blaze of the hundred wax-lights, the happy, animated faces, the voluptuous music pealing still in its harmonious madness, the handsome man standing beside her, looking down with undisguised admiration on her downcast face. I think the members of Kate's new sisterhood would have been surprised to see their proselyte to-night. I think they would have stared, if their meek eyes could have lit on this girl, with the waves and seas of tulle, pale sea green and virgin white, floating crisply round her, with that one big heavy garden lily, shining star-like among the twisted wealth of such hair as seemed borrowed from one of Guido's Magdalenes; this girl, with polished shoulders gleaming bare, and flashing eyes. There was no use denying it, Kate was enjoying herself, and looked as if she was. Meanwhile Maggie and her

lover were standing together, resting likewise, in a pause of the surging, whirling waltz. Maggie looks up in his face, with her head rose-crowned, like some guest at a Roman banquet, and says with a sigh :

“ Ah, George, this is the last day that you and I will ever be able to dance together.”

“ Why so ?”

“ O; married people cannot go valseing about together ; it is so undignified ; nobody ever does it.”

“ We will set the fashion then, Maggie, and show them what a good plan it is.”

“ Ah, it won't be the same.”

“ I don't see why it should not.”

“ George, I'm glad that cluster of men at the door is dispersed at last ; they did look so disconsolate.”

“ Yes, they have all got partners somehow ; Kate and Tankerville seem getting on like a house on fire, don't they ?

“ Yes, is it not amusing ?”

In another part of the room, one of Blount's partners, one of the most promising of the seventeen-year-olds, is saying to him :

"You must take me back to mamma, please, now ; she does not like me to stay away long."

"Nonsense," says Blount, protectingly ; "I could not think of such a thing ; it's so much jollier walking about like everybody else."

"Ah, but mamma will not be pleased, she is so particular."

"She's not looking this way at all ; she is talking to that old woman on the other side ; she'll forget all about you if you don't remind her. Come and have an ice."

"O, very well, but you must not be long, please, because I'm engaged for the next dance."

And then she shows him her card, and he writes his own name repeatedly down the length of it, and they flutter off to-

gether, two remarkably happy young butterflies. So the night wears on ; and the flowers and garlands on the walls swing and vibrate with the motion of the dancers dancing in tune ; and the music sounds on, now clashing and blaring out, now sighing and whispering ; and pretty faces get flushed, and little feet fly faster than ever, and dresses get torn and dishevelled. Maggie has retired into a corner with George, and sits demure, and thinks of the morrow. Blount is dragging along a portly fat woman, piloting her with infinite skill among the shoals and quicksands of the crowded room ; and Kate, a white-armed siren, is swimming lightly and buoyantly round in the embrace of a heavy dragoon. Then supper comes, and champagne flows like water, and laughter bubbles up from jocund hearts,

“ And all went merry as a marriage-bell.”

As Kate mounts the stairs from the

supper-room. to the dancing-hall a sound comes to her ears, very incongruous with the sounds she has been hearing — the luxurious music, and the soft words that

“Seemed a part of the music,”

—the sound of a solemn bell tolling mournfully.

“What’s that?” she says breathlessly, and she looks up, trembling with affright, in her companion’s face. “What’s that bell tolling for? is there anybody dead?”

He laughs.

“It’s not tolling,” he said; “it’s only the old church clock striking midnight: you know it is close at the back of this house, so we hear it so plain.”

She smiles palely.

“I don’t know what’s come to me to-night,” she says; “I’m so absurdly nervous. I feel as if I could scream with fright at my own shadow. I wonder what’s going to happen.”



"Nothing," he answers, "except that you are going to give me the next dance, I hope; a good galop will soon shake the terrors out of you."

Kate is reassured a little, but the impression made upon her by that grave heavy sound booming out upon the summer night cannot be quite shaken off. Reason tells her that it was but a clock striking, but still it seems to her to have been sent as a warning;—but warning of what? Again she dances; sliding down the long room in the bounding galop they go; and men straggle up from supper, and commend again the sinuous form and the brilliant face. Suddenly something drops from Kate's arm with a ring on the floor; her partner stoops to pick it up, and gives it back into her hands. It is a gold bracelet with dark blue enamel, and "Gott schütze dich" (God protect thee) in gold letters upon it. The enamel is cracked across, the letters split and riven. Kate turns pale again.

"What a bad omen!" she says hastily. "I have dropped that bracelet often and often, and it never broke before; O, I'm certain something is going to happen."

"You don't believe in omens, surely?" asks her partner incredulously.

"Yes, indeed I do; and besides I feel such an extraordinary oppression, such a dull weight on my soul to-night, that I am certain, perfectly certain, that something dreadful is hanging over me. I'm afraid you'll think me a great fool," she added, trying to laugh.

"No, indeed, I don't, but I think you're very needlessly alarmed."

Kate would not dance a step more; all the springy lightness was gone out of her feet. Those two trifling circumstances had completely broken the spell—destroyed the brief enchantment of the hour. She longed for the ball to be over—longed to get that haunting music out of her ears, those blazing lights out of her eyes—longed to be home

again, and able to close her lids in the dark, and shut out the images of fear that came crowding before them. Try as she would, she could not get free from the entanglement of those groundless fears, those childish shudderings. Ever in the midst of the gay crowded room there seemed to be a blackness rising up round her. I called the room crowded, but the truth was that at this time of the evening it was still rather empty, rather thin; champagne and cold chicken held their own completely against music and dancing. People were slowly dribbling back, by twos and threes, indeed, but the majority were feasting still. Kate looked round with searching gaze. Neither Maggie nor George nor Blount to be seen anywhere. Then her eyes fell on Mr. Piggott reposing on a bench in a corner, after a light repast of calf's-foot jelly and sherry-and-water. This had been a very happy evening for him, for he had had the good luck to make acquaintance with an

old lady, whose symptoms, as regarded shooting pains, derangement of the system, &c., strongly resembled his own. He was now sitting beside her, amicably comparing notes with her on the subject of their mutual disorders. Kate made her way across to him. "Mr. Piggott," she said, "will you tell Margaret, when you see her, that if she wants me, I am to be found in the conservatory? I really am so hot and tired that I cannot dance any more."

"Very well, my dear love. I'll tell her, if you wish," replied he blandly; "but, my little maid, don't you think that it is a little bit imprudent of you to be going straight out of this heated room into the cold air?" (it was a sultry July night)—"and besides, I am sure I have heard many doctors say that the smell of flowers at night is very injurious. Do try and be a little careful of yourself, my love, I beg."

"O, I'm not afraid; they'll do me no harm," Kate said. She moved away to the

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door, and then sauntered slowly down the long conservatory to a seat there was at the end, half hidden in green orange-boughs. There she sank down and rested, *perdue*. Down the long vista of waving leaves, and glowing flowers, and Chinese lanterns, she saw the brilliant ball-room at the end, and figures passing to and fro. Hither the music came with a subdued mellowness of sound. Here it was quiet and fragrant and very cool. "How I wish the night was over!" she kept saying to herself over and over again. "How I wish it was morning! I should feel safer then; one never feels such vague terrors of a morning. Why was it that I felt such a sudden consternation come over me when I heard that simple common sound? It is perfectly inexplicable."

Then her dream flashed back, vivid as reality, upon her. Dreams do that often in the evening; even if forgotten and blotted out of memory during the daylight hours,

at evening-tide back they come again, fresh as when first written on the waxen tablets of the brain. Where they go or whence they return, we know not, but so it is. That dream did not come for nothing, Kate felt very sure; it meant something. It was a shadow cast before by some substance not yet come up, coming up, though, surely, silently, against her. Dreams went by opposites; if you dreamt of a marriage there would ensue a death, But who was going to die? Was it herself? The bravest of us shriek and quail when we picture ourselves in the embrace of the great king. We cannot look the sun in the face, he is too bright; we cannot look death in the face, he is too dark. Gloomy thoughts these for a marriage feast!

Suddenly the solitude she had sought with such eagerness became oppressive, irksome to her; as no one attempted to disturb it, it lost its value. It struck her, too, with surprise that the music had entirely

ceased : there was a much longer interval than that usually allowed between the last valse and the cotillon that was to follow it. Curiosity prompted her to rise and reënter the dancing-room. It was almost deserted; here and there half-a-dozen people were grouped, near the door principally; but the musicians were gone; the dancers' feet were still. Two men she knew were standing, talking together quickly, earnestly, and their faces looked pale in the gas-light; but gas-light does impart a ghastly look to even the rosiest.

"Is everybody gone?" she said with her charming smile. "What a hurry you are all in to leave us! Is it Cinderella over again on a large scale? When the clock struck twelve did everybody turn into kitchenmaids, and their coaches into pumpkins?"

"Is it possible you have not heard?" exclaimed the younger of the two men. "Good heavens! where can you have been?"

"Heard what?" she said, her smile fading into a surprised gravity.

"Well, you see," began the other man, to whom nature had originally given a long face, and who thought it necessary to lengthen it artificially on the present occasion,—“well, you see, there has been an accident, a very serious accident; a man driving down from town to the ball here, thrown out of his dog-cart at the very door—actually at the very door,” he repeated emphatically; as if the fact of its having occurred at the door instead of the window formed the gist of the catastrophe.

"How terrible!" exclaimed Kate in a shocked voice. "Poor man! how did it happen?" and the divinest light of pity streamed into her eyes.

"Coming round that sharp corner, don't you know, by the stables, the horse shied at something—a heap of stones, or a wheelbarrow, or something—everybody was talking at the same time, and I did not exactly



make out what—threw the groom out one side, and Stamer the other, and the wheels went over him.”

The inquiring pitying look changed into a frozen, stony stare of horror and fear.

“*Who?*” she said, clutching the narrator’s arm.

“Stamer—Colonel Stamer ; he is in the Guards. You don’t know him, do you ?”

“Is he *dead?*” she said in a hissing whisper, and her breath came quick and short, like one that has run a weary way with a deadly foe behind him, and her face looked pinched and drawn.

“No-o-o, not yet ; but I’m afraid it must come to that : crushed internally I think ; *may* last till morning. Dear me, Miss Chester, you are not going to faint, are you ? Let me get you a glass of water. It was very thoughtless of me telling you so suddenly !” he ejaculates with flurried compunction.

Twice she tried to speak ; twice the

disobedient voice refused to pass the portals of the parched white lips ; at last with a tremendous effort of the will, she succeeded in articulating hoarsely the one word "Where?"

"Where is he, you mean?" said the younger man catching her meaning : "as I came upstairs they were just carrying him in, and laying him on a sofa. O, let me get you a chair ; you look terribly ill, and I'll go and see how he is."

She put her hand to her head dizzily.

"No, no!" she said in a harsh whisper, "I don't want you ; I'm going myself."

They watched her with a dumb astonishment, as she passed with a step that did not falter out of the room, and down the stairs.

"I had not a notion she knew him," says one to the other with a dismayed intimation, "poor little girl, she looks as like death as he does ; one of his many victims, I suppose?"

"De mortuis nil nisi bonum!" says the other gravely; "and if poor Stamer does not come under that head yet, he is not far off it, unless I'm very much mistaken."

The hall and the vestibule of the hotel are full of people, and there is a dull confused noise of voices and footsteps: girls in opera-cloaks with pale scared faces, hurrying to their carriages—hurrying away from the place where they came to meet Love and Pleasure, and where instead the officious "spectre with the bony head" has thrust his grisly presence upon them. A crowd of men, gentlemen, waiters, boots, and servants are pressing round a man in a groom's livery, who, with torn coat and battered hat, is telling over and over again, to an ever-fresh audience, the tale of his own escape and his master's destruction. Chambermaids in smart caps and white aprons are huddling together, sobbing vociferously (the tears of the uneducated are proverbially near their eyes); emulously vying with each other in

the race to hysterics. The fact of a man having been killed at his door has imparted a prestige to his establishment, of which the landlord is, with modest pride, aware. Strange, is not it, that the rabid love for horrors should be an instinct, so deeply planted in the vulgar mind, that it requires the education of a lifetime to outroot our love for "raw-head and bloody-bones"? A murder, of course, is the source whence the keenest enjoyment is to be derived—a wife-murder with a good deal of poker, and of hair torn out; but still there is a fair amount of pleasant excitement to be extracted from a good accident, always presupposing plenty of mangling and broken bones.

At the foot of the stairs Kate comes upon George. An habitually jovial laughing face looks so exceedingly odd when compelled by circumstances to assume a sad and solemn air: George did not look like George.

"Where are you going, Kate? This is

no place for you; go back, dear," he says authoritatively, but very kindly.

"Don't stop me," she replies in hard metallic tones, from which all emotion is entirely absent, "let me pass, please."

"No, indeed, you must not," he says, seizing her hand with eager compassionate remonstrance; "you cannot do him any good; poor fellow, it is all up with him."

She makes no answer; she only endeavours unsuccessfully to slip past him. Maggie standing by, shawled and cloaked for departure, her face looking out pallid from a little cherry-coloured hood, interposes:

"You must not, indeed, Kate; just think what you are doing. George, she does not mind a word I say; *do* stop her. What *will* people say? it will be all over the town, to-morrow."

To-morrow! What was to-morrow to her? What are all the endless to-morrows that the world will open its tired eyes on?

What does she care if every vulgar soul in Queenstown follow her with hootings and hissings, and shameful names to-morrow? She wrenches her hand out of George's grasp; she would leave it there torn off, if that were the only way of freeing herself. A door ajar—one or two people hovering about it with attentive eyes and ears, a sort of audible silence within—tell her whither to direct her steps. She neither knocks nor hesitates. Whose leave should she ask? Who has so good a right to be near him as she? She finds herself in a large, bright sitting-room; Utrecht velvet, walnut-wood, a great chandelier;—it looks a room to live in, not one to die in. They carried him in here, because it was the nearest place—because he was a dead-weight on their hands and in bitter, bitter pain.

Well, he had always said long ago that he hoped he should not waste away tediously by inches on a sick bed; and his wish will be gratified. A man in a black coat,

who might be a doctor, might be an undertaker (and are they not brothers-in-arms?), and two or three women, are standing round, whispering loudly, disturbingly about him. He is still "*he*;" not yet "*it*." They have partly undressed him, and laid him on the sofa, and there he lies, his dying head—the short rings of silky hair damp with the death-dews—thrown back, his broad shoulders indenting the cushion, and his strong right hand hanging nerveless towards the floor. There he lies, like a fallen Colossus, weak as a two-years' child,—Samson robbed of his strength; only the Dalilah who has shorn this Samson's locks of might is Death. There he lies, open-eyed, full-conscious as in the heyday of his youth and strength, while a voice keeps dinning into his ears, "Thou must die, thou must die!" and his soul answers unflinching, "I know it; hold ye your peace!"

Kate pushes aside the attendants unce-

remoniously, rudely. In moments of profound mastering emotion we shake ourselves free from the artificial restraints of society and education, as some strong runner, ere setting forth on a long hard race, casts away the heavy garments that would hinder his flight, and returns to the instinct and impulses of Nature. They look at her open-mouthed, in inquisitive astonishment; but something in her face prevents them from asking what brings her here, what business calls her to this dying stranger's side.

"One of the Miss Chesters," says the landlady, in a loud explanatory aside to the doctor, "the younger one. I'm sure, sir, I cannot imagine what brings her here—no relative,—nor how her sister can let her; if she were *my* daughter—"

Dare turns his head restlessly on the pillow.

"What are you all whispering about?" says the deep voice, with irritation. "For



God's sake speak out loud, if you must speak at all." He raises himself a little to have a better view of his surroundings, and his eyes fall upon Kate. He does not seem at all surprised at seeing her. He might have been expecting her, from the little astonishment he expresses. To the dying nothing is a surprise. The one immeasurable, unimaginable, supreme surprise on whose closest marge they stand takes away and utterly annihilates the force of all lesser ones. I think that, were the very dead to come back and hold speech with the dying it would seem to them no strange thing.

In his eyes was no astonishment, only a great, quiet, satisfied joy, triumphant over pain. In that look passion was dead, and love reigned immortal among the ruins of mortality. He said, "Send them away, Kate."

She turned with composure to the doctor, "You hear what he says; will you

go, please? We should like to be left alone."

So they went. Then he held out his arms,—the arms that two hours ago were an athlete's, that now were feeble as any sucking child's,—and she fled to them. Anyone listening at that door might have thought Death come already, so utter was the silence of that supreme embrace. At length Stamer spoke.

"At last!" he said, with a long-drawn sigh, and a faint tender smile. "Kate, you are not afraid of me now, are you? I shall never be able to do you harm any more; the lion has had his teeth and claws drawn."

At James Stanley's deathbed Kate had wept and wailed; the lesser grief unlocked the floodgates of her tears, the greater sealed them in their hidden founts. She rocked herself backwards and forwards.

"Is this the end? is this the end?" she said, in her great despair.

"The *very* end," Dare answered, speaking slowly. It was rather a labour to him to talk; one is not fluent when one is dying. "O, child, child, to-night I'm going *somewhere*, or—" (with a pause) "who knows?—*nowhere*!"

A spasm of agony crossed her face.

"Don't talk that way," she said, with a gesture of despair; "it kills me to hear you. O, my poor dear fellow, you *are* going somewhere indeed! O, I wonder is it anywhere good?"

"It's not much worth while wondering," he answers calmly; "before morning I shall *know*."

She threw herself on her knees, and laid her soft burning cheek on the cushion beside him.

"My darling," she whispered, "let me say one little prayer for you! let me, O let me! O, love, love, you are going to God! Won't you ask Him to have pity on you?"

Dare shook his head.

"Little woman," he said, speaking with difficulty, and stroking her face very tenderly with his hand, "it's no good; it's—too late—too late!"

"It's *never* too late," she said with passionate earnestness; "O, don't think that! God's goodness is infinite; greater and fuller than we can imagine or conceive. The gate of mercy stands always open! O Dare, Dare, at this last moment try to enter there; no one ever yet found it shut."

Her voice broke down, choked with overwhelming emotion; her whole soul went out in that passionate pleading. But she spake to inattentive ears.

"Child!" he said, after a while, and his voice was hollow and weak, "give me your hand; sit where I can see you!"

So they sat, the dying and the living, hand-in-hand, through the short hot summer night. Few words exchanged they: he could not think of much beside his

grievous pain ; it was only with a mighty wrench that the reluctant soul tore itself away from the strong young form that cased it. The stars sink softly into their Western graves : a rosy smile begins to play about the cold lips of the East ; then the sun comes up laughing above the garden wall and the climbing roses, and shoots a whole sheaf of his arrows into the dim shadowy room.

The bright shafts strike up along the ceiling, and play in little flames about the pendants of the chandelier, and paint with their own delicate crimson the clammy brow, the drawn sharpened features, and the damp sunken eyes of the dying man ; paint, as if in mockery, the lips and cheeks that the quick human blood will redden never more. Then she knew that his hour was come. He had been lying passive in a sort of heavy slumber, that yet was not slumber, a sort of intermediate state between sleep and death ; and when the

light smote sharply on his heavy eyelids, they raised themselves once more, and one languid hand lifted itself very feebly towards his breast, as though seeking something.

“Love, what is it?” she said, stooping over him, and trying to interpret with the agonised keenness that only the watcher beside a deathbed knows the last doubtful difficult signs of consciousness, the last waving of hands, and syllabling of adieux of him who is already half way over the black ferry of Death. She laid her face close to his lips, and heard him whisper between struggling gasps for the slow-coming breath, “Pen Dyllas,—long ago!” Then she knew that what he sought was the withered poppy she had given him in the Pen Dyllas corn-field years ago, when their love was young. He saw that she understood him—“Buried with me!” he said in a husky whisper; and, babbling the words over and over again purposelessly,

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as the dying do babble words from which  
the meaning has fled, he fell into a stupor,  
and so passed.

## CHAPTER X.

AND so Dare Stamer, like the Israelitish king of old, departed without being desired, save by one infatuated woman whose life his love had laid waste. And indifferent hired women came and made his sad toilet for the grave, and then closed the shutters—as if the light could hurt his quiet eyes *now*—and left him. And guests came and went about the house on errands of business or curiosity, and talked and drank, and heard with careless interest of how he had died, and how much he had suffered, while he lay there in the dark alone. And when five days were come and gone there rose a stir in the house, and the neighbours put their heads out of window, and gaped and stared at the



black array of mourning coaches, at the crape-scarfed mourners, at the long dark hearse, with its nidding-nodding plumes that seemed endowed with a sort of ghastly life, and at all the silly paraphernalia with which we try to clothe in childish terrors not his own our already sufficiently terrible victor. So they took Dare Stamer away, and carried him down to far-off Pen Dyllas, and laid him with his fathers in the Stamer vault in the cemetery by the sea. There the waves come twice a day and sing his requiem; there the flowers blossom out freely under the rain and the shine; and the night winds come and go at will above his dreamless head.

About a month after Dare's death there was a wedding in Queenstown—a very quiet wedding, *sans* cake, *sans* cards, *sans* breakfast, *sans* speechifying, *sans* everything almost, save the unavoidable parson and the indissoluble vows. And after the wedding and a short honeymoon, the wedded pair

established themselves in a charming little cottage in the country, all roses and myrtles and earwigs, and the bride's sister went with them. They had said to her very kindly, "Come with us;" and her heart being sore and thirsting for the balm of the love of any human thing, she had gone with them. She had put on no mourning for him; they would not let her; and, indeed, what right had she? To have worn black would but have been an insult to his memory; would but have brought back the remembrance of his evil deeds. So she went about in her coloured clothes, and fought day and night with the grief that was a sin.

George Chester has sold out; he has turned his sword into a ploughshare, has invested in a broad-brimmed straw-hat, has abandoned the struggle with his increasing *embonpoint*, leans over his pigsty-wall on a Sunday afternoon, and walks about with a spud. I think that prosperity is mostly

intolerant of adversity; it's very, very difficult figuratively to get inside another person: regulate your pulse-beats by theirs; quicken or slacken the pulsation of your heart in harmony with theirs. Human power of sympathy is limited. I confess myself totally unable to estimate the sensations of the man who fancied himself a teapot; it is a very admirable divinely compassionate maxim that bids us rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep; but, O, it is often most difficult of execution. When one feels that tears are miles away from one's jubilant eyes—jubilant over some pleasant green meadow in one's own life; when the corners of one's mouth insist upon turning jocundly up, instead of lachrymosely down, the sight of reddened eyelids, puckered brow, and swollen nose, excite in one rather a sense of infuriation and aggrievedness against the owner of those pleasant pieces of property, than of pity or sympathy with them. One

does not like such ugly pieces of furniture, does one, amongst one's ormolu writing-cases and buhl clocks and rosewood tables; at all events Maggie Chester did not. Her very sisterly love and pride put weapons in her hand against Kate. "Is *that* Mrs. Chester's pretty sister?" she had heard somebody saying to somebody else, one hot Sunday afternoon, as somebody and everybody and nobody came drifting together out of church, feeling very cross at having had five minutes more brimstone and sulphur than usual inflicted on them by the Low Church curate. Yes, that strange woman might well ask. Kate will never be Mrs. Chester's pretty sister any more at all. She laid down her beauty with the green-and-white filmy garments in which she had knelt in dishevelled despair by dying Dare, and prayed in an agony for his reckless, prayerless parting soul. If Kate had been a widow, an interesting young widow, with crape up to her chin, clear

lawn sleeves, and a Marie-Stuart cap coming down in a peak on her forehead, and sweeping away in crisp freshness behind her little round ears,—a widow accomplishing the days of mourning lugubriously yet becomingly for a lawful husband who had been fitly and properly ushered into the next world with bell, book, and candle, it would have been all very well; but to go about in pink muslin, sunken-cheeked, hollow-eyed, for a remarkably wicked and (odder still) a remarkably ugly married man was more than could enter into Mrs. Chester's philosophy.

“What she ever could see in him!” she says one morning, in impatient ejaculation to her husband, as she goes about the garden in gardening-gloves and a pair of big scissors, snipping off defunct scarlet geraniums. “There certainly was plenty of him. Well, poor man, I suppose one ought not to speak evil of him now he is gone—though, indeed, if one talks about him at

all I don't see what else one can speak—and O, George, what an ugly shape his nose was!"

"Well, poor fellow, he did not make it himself," says George with magnanimity, passing his finger at the same time complacently down the ridge of his own straight blunt feature. "He was the best shot I ever saw at a rabbit," he adds pensively, on the principle of (however irrelevantly to the subject in hand) giving the devil his due.

"How Kate," continues Margaret, viciously pinching off a dead Trentham rose, "with her ideas of religion and goodness, *can* reconcile it to her conscience to go about wearing the willow for another person's property I can't imagine; and such an unbecoming vegetable as the willow is to wear too!"

That same afternoon the two women were sitting together in the little cottage drawing-room. The furniture was almost

exactly the same as it used to be in the Queenstown drawing-room; there were the same faint unmistakably amateur water-colours on the walls, the same Broadwood in the corner. The women were the same too; the same, and yet—O, not the same; Maggie is already getting the staid prosaic matronly look of one who has fulfilled her vocation, of one who has no longer on her brow the weight of a destiny to accomplish, but who, having fulfilled that destiny, may sit down and grow fat and comfortable over it.

As for Kate, poor stranded Kate, she is like the wreck of some fair brave ship that once, not long ago, breasted the billows gallantly, and cut the green water with strong sharp prow; whose friends the loud winds were, and whose stout timbers defied the waves' rough play; but now, dismasted, shattered, can but pray for some little gentle breeze to waft her softly to a kindly port

"Kate, I wish you would go out for a walk of a day; you look so pale," Maggie says, after a lengthened survey of her sister's countenance.

"I always was pale," Kate answers, without looking up.

"Yes, I know that; but it was quite a different sort of pale," with a discontented intonation.

Kate raises her eyes with a rather sorrowful smile in them. "You mean that it used to be a pretty pale, and that now it is an ugly one. Do you think I need anyone to tell me I have grown ugly? I don't even require a looking-glass to give me that information. I can see it in the faces of the people I meet."

"It's uncommonly uncivil of them, if you can," Maggie says with indignation. She sees plainly enough herself the wreck of her sister's beauty, but she is exceedingly enraged that anyone else should see it too.



Silence for ten minutes or so; then Kate rises suddenly, comes over to her sister, and kneels down beside her knees like any simple docile child.

"Maggie," she says earnestly, "do you know this won't do?"

"What won't do?"

"Why, I have tried your plan of life. I have taken your advice; I have not been obstinate, have I? I have given it a fair trial, and it's driving me mad as fast as it can."

Margaret seizes her sister's two hands in hers. "Why can't you forget that man?" she says impulsively. "I wish to God you had never seen him. I do believe he was the very wickedest man that ever lived."

Kate snatches away one small cold hand, and covers her eyes with it.

"Can't you see," she says very passionately, "that it's his very wickedness that puts the sharpest sting in my grief? If he had been a good man that I could think

of in some good happy place, don't you think I could wait patiently enough through the little space that would elapse till I should go and meet him again, if I were good too? But now—now what can I pray for? what can I hope about him? Too late! too late!" she cries, wringing her hands wildly; "they were his own words, and they keep dinning in my ears like some dreadful ghastly knell."

Maggie is silent. On such a subject what consolation can she give?

"Maggie," continues Kate excitedly, "I must go and find some work in the world to do. Don't try to hinder me; while I sit here idle, with hands folded in my lap, I feel the solid earth slipping away from under my feet. Hope went away from me long ago, and now faith is going too. I begin to feel growing on me an incapacity for believing anything. O Maggie, Maggie! let me go away and try to pray and work and *tire* myself into belief and peace again."

So they strove no more against her;

they perceived that some voice, such as spoke to Christian, bidding him flee from the City of Destruction, had spoken to her too, and they could not counsel her to disallow it; so with tears and kisses and blessings they sent her forth, and she returned to them no more. She joined that band of holy devoted women whom Evangelical clergymen condemn as acolytes and handmaidens of the Scarlet Woman, whom lazy loiterers in the gardens and vineyards of life "damn with faint praise." With these she went in and out, trembling at first, shrinking at first, yet brave and constant always, among the smoky reeking alleys and courts of filthy, suffering, heart-rending London. Truly she wrought, striving ever, as the days went by, to set her faint stumbling feet firmer and surer in the footprints of that greater One than John the Baptist, who eighteen hundred summers back healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out devils beside Genesareth's still lake and Jordan's

blue river. Early and late she toiled, giving her days and her nights, her feeble strength, and all her tender woman's heart, to the abating by but a few drops the great ocean of human anguish; and, for meed of her labours, won much weariness of body, oftentimes discouragement of soul, and small cold praise. Sometimes the mists came down about her thick and black, and demon voices whispered in her ears, demon faces grinned before her eyes; but she held on boldly, and would none of them. Sometimes a faint shaft of light reached her from the great distant fountain-head towards which we have all been struggling, making small progress, as it seems, through six thousand dragging years. And when many days had come and gone, when youth was just beginning to merge into gray beautiful middle age, he who is always reading over the long muster-roll of human names came to the name of Kate Chester; and she, hearing, rose up—

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yea, rose up very gladly; and having ended,  
whether well or ill, her day's work, passed  
as we, knowing not, yet hope,

"To where, beyond these voices, there is peace."

THE END.

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